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Butler, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

Mubarak advises compliance

DECLARING that the situation was grave, President Hosni Mubarak yesterday advised Iraqi Foreign Minister Mohamed Said Al-Sahhaf to comply with UN Security Council resolutions "in order to avoid additional complications," reports **Nevine Khalil**.

Mubarak met with Sahhaf for over an hour at the presidential palace. "I informed the Iraqi minister that the situation is grave, that they should realise this and implement Security Council resolutions in order to avoid additional complications," Mubarak said. "I conveyed to them my viewpoint and the decision rests with them."

Mubarak said the American position is that unless Iraq complies, there will be a strike. "There is a build-up of forces [in the Gulf] and I strongly fear that unless Iraq complies, there will be a strike. Nobody will be able to prevent the United States," Mubarak added.

The president came out strongly in favour of Iraq's territorial unity. "We oppose any division of Iraq," he said. "The division of Iraq will not solve the problem. It will lead to continuous fighting. We are for the territorial unity of Iraq." Asked whether the time was ripe for an Arab summit, Mubarak replied: "At present, no."

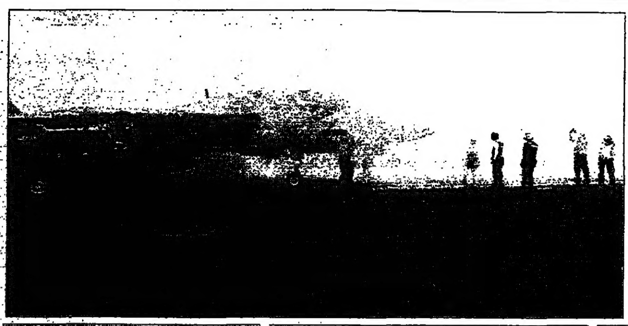
Mubarak denied that there was an Arab initiative to defuse the Iraqi crisis. "There is no Arab initiative whatsoever. An Arab initiative must emanate from all Arab countries. This has not happened."

Sahhaf said Iraq would agree to inspections of eight disputed presidential sites by a committee of experts appointed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Sahhaf told reporters that a special committee appointed by the UN chief would be given access to "all sites," including the eight to which members of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM) have been denied entry.

Egyptian officials would not say whether Cairo was satisfied with Iraq's announcement yesterday and whether it would diffuse the crisis. "We do not consider what was presented to us today to be the final solution," said Mubarak's chief political adviser Osama El-Baz after the talks. "We are waiting for developments." El-Baz added that Egypt was not mediating between the parties, noting that the two points of dispute which remain are the composition of the inspection team, and time limits and frequency of inspections.

Yesterday, Mubarak also received Abdel-Aziz Al-Dkheil, the Kuwaiti minister of state for cabinet affairs, who conveyed a message from the emir of Kuwait, saying that his country "is in favour of a peaceful settlement".

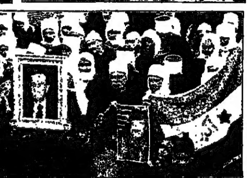
photos: AFP, Reuters & AP











Clockwise from top left: A Tomcat fighter prepares for take-off on the USS George Washington in the Gulf on Monday, as rehearsals intensified for what now seem inevitable hostilities; meanwhile, popular protest against US military action spreads across the world — seen here in Palestine, the Golan Heights, Nepal and Russia

Staring tragedy in the face

The troops are here, and short of total Iraqi submission, war seems inevitable. **Dina Ezzat** and **Galal Nassar** explore scenarios of compromise and devastation

Saddam Hussein will have to submit totally and open all sites to "complete and unfettered" UN inspection or face American military action, which will be more than one air strike but less than an all-out war. This is how officials and analysts in Cairo now view the continuing stand-off between Iraq and the United States.

However, some diplomatic sources still hope that a political compromise might be worked out through Russian, French and Arab League mediation efforts.

According to an informed source, the most the mediators are hoping for is to persuade the United States to accept a slight change in the make-up of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOM), which is charged with dismantling Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. The proposal under consideration would attach additional inspectors, of various nationalities, to the Commission, change its designation from "inspection" to "fact-finding", and alter Richard Butler's job description from "chief inspector" to "senior diplomat", the source said.

Whether this would be acceptable to the Americans, who insist on complete and unfettered access to all sites, is an open question. But, according to the source, Saddam Hussein appears to be ready to accept this compromise because he has been told by several Arab heads-of-state that unless he gives in to the American demands, an American strike is inevitable. "The Americans are not bluffing," the source said. "A strike will be more than hitting Iraqi presidential and military sites with missiles, but will not amount to an all-out war, involving ground battles."

The sources are far from confident that the political settlement scenario will emerge as the winner in this race against time. But they say that they "hope" it will work out, that Saddam will be realistic and that the US will somehow be persuaded by the Russians and the French that it cannot deal so brutally with Iraq at a time when Middle East peacemaking is faltering.

Despite these factors, the odds are nevertheless on military action because both Saddam and President Bill Clinton have their credibility to worry about. It is difficult for Saddam to give in completely to the Americans. As for Clinton, he can hardly summon home the impressive military forces he has assembled in the Gulf without taking some form of action. "Clinton's credibility has suffered already as a result of the Monica Lewinsky affair and he cannot afford to lose more credibility," one analyst said.

According to Maj. Gen. [retr'd] Kamal Shedid, "gathering such a formidable force in the Gulf means that military action must be taken. From a military perspective, the failure to take action now would be a great defeat."

Another source put it even more bluntly. "The Americans are not ready to accept a compromise because they do not want a compromise. They simply want Saddam to submit fully — something which he has not yet decided to do," the source said.

The question now, the source added, is simply whether Saddam is prepared to grant UNSCOM the complete and unfettered access the Americans are demanding.

"It is very difficult to predict what Saddam will do because nobody knows how he makes his calculations," the source said. "So far, there is no evidence that he is planning to give the Americans what they want."

If that is so, then the result will be tragedy.

One possible scenario is that the Americans and the British will launch heavy strikes, for five days, against Saddam's presidential palaces, the Republican Guard and other military targets. If Saddam does not give in, the strikes will continue, primarily against Baghdad, for another two weeks.

In an even more bleak scenario, the strikes will target Baghdad radio and television and power stations and the US will declare southern Iraq a no-fly zone. Given the Turkish military incursion in the north, this will confine Saddam to the central section of Iraq.

"The Turks are already in northern Iraq and nobody can predict what the Iranians will do if southern Iraq turns into a trouble spot, with large numbers of refugees trying to cross into Iran," warned one source.

Informed sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the American and British forces in the Gulf had staged a rehearsal for the strike on 4 February.

What will be the sequel to the American strike? The first possibility is that a weakened Saddam, relying on his repressive policies and the absence of any alternative, will remain in power. But his regime will continue to be buffeted by dissent, coup attempts and defections. Such a situation cannot possibly last for more than a few years, following which some military commander will stage a bloody coup and seize power.

A second possibility is that, with the rising Turkish power in the north and the collapse of Baghdad's authority in the south, Iraq's territorial unity might begin to fragment. It is likely that foreign powers, such as Iran and Turkey, would rush to provide aid to the northern and southern zones in an attempt to gain a foothold there, at the expense of Baghdad's central authority.

A third possibility is that the Americans will take the crucial decision to remove Saddam from power, although sources concede that this is not at the top of the list of American priorities.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa will speak only of the hope for a diplomatic solution. Following talks in Paris last Monday with French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine, Moussa reported some progress with diplomatic efforts. "That progress centres around the fact that the Iraqi government has shifted its position from total refusal of the inspection of certain sites to allowing inspection of those sites," Moussa said.

"There are some details that have not been agreed upon. It is for the mediators, France and Russia, to work out the modalities," Moussa added.

(see pp. 2, 4, 7, 10 & 11)

Ghali: no

FORMER UN Chief Boutros Boutros-Ghali appealed yesterday against taking military action against Baghdad, which he said would only worsen the plight of the Iraqi people already suffering under tight sanctions.

"The Iraqi people are suffering from an eight-year-old embargo. This is an already tragic situation to which now bombs will be added," Boutros-Ghali told a news conference in Paris marking the end of a ministerial meeting of La Francophonie, the group of 46 "French-speaking" nations.

Ghali, now secretary-general of La Francophonie, said, "The United Nations was created for the people, not for governments. The Iraqi people are not responsible for their government." He added, "We must act on all levels in order to find a peaceful solution."

Denmark: yes

DENMARK said it supported military intervention in Iraq by a US-led alliance if diplomatic efforts failed to resolve the current stand-off between Baghdad and the United Nations.

"It is perfectly understandable that military action is under consideration," Danish Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen told Denmark's TV2 News late Tuesday night. "If it is appropriate and we receive a request for assistance [with possible attacks on Iraqi weapons sites], we will obviously consider it," Petersen said.

When the bombs fall

As the US moves closer to a military strike against Iraq, Arafat treads softly. But will his people follow? **Graham Usher**, in Jerusalem, examines the crisis's implications for the Palestinian territories

On Monday, some 2,000 Palestinians marched through the West Bank town of Jenin in support of Iraq. It was the largest of a series of demonstrations over the last week in which Palestinians of all political stripes have turned out, partly out of solidarity with the Iraqi people, but mainly to vent their anger at Israel, America and, increasingly, Britain. In Jenin, aside from the usual slogans in favour of Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein and the carrying of mock-up Scud missiles, the protest's climax was a ritualistic burning of Israeli, American and British flags.

Predictably, it was these scenes that most grabbed Israel's attention. "It brings back unpleasant memories" of Palestinian support for Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War, said Israeli Leader Binyamin Netanyahu, at a Jerusalem conference on 9 February. The day before, the centrist Israeli newspaper, *Ma'ariv*, editorialised that "the crisis with Iraq will pass quicker than the impression that such [pro-Iraq Palestinian] demonstrations make on Israeli public opinion."

But there are differences between today's protests and the Palestinians' earlier, desperate identification with Saddam. Most of the current demonstrations are small-scale affairs. On Monday, only a few hundred Palestinians showed up for a protest in Ramallah, a sign of apathy that the rains sweeping the West Bank that day could only partly explain.

There is also the fact that Palestinian sympathy for Iraq is inextricably tied up with their frustration with the stalled peace process. Thus, while America and Britain have been swift to amass a lethal armada in the Persian Gulf to "force" Iraq to comply with UN resolutions, Palestinians see the same powers unwilling to apply the slightest pressure on Israel to implement long-standing UN resolutions or even peace agreements with the Palestinians that Israel has signed, the Knesset has endorsed and the Americans have guaranteed. "Had there been progress in the peace process, we would have had reasons to censor our feelings," commented the Palestinian Authority's (PA) head of Israeli affairs, Sufian Abu Zaida. "But," since there is no progress, "there is no reason to do so".

The critical difference, however, lies in the stance of the Palestinian leadership. At the Ramallah demonstration, Fatah's West Bank leader, Marwan Barghouti, made it clear that his movement's decision to support Iraq was an independent one "with no connection to the PA". It is a line that, so far, Yasser Arafat has been careful to maintain.

In the earlier conflict, Arafat famously (or infamously) sided with Iraq because, as he put it in 1991, "the PLO cannot but be in the trenches against Israel and the champions of Israel". It was probably the most disastrous decision of his 30-year leadership. In the war's aftermath, Arafat found himself isolated from the rest of the Arab world, abandoned by the PLO's main paymasters in the Gulf and confronted with a fresh influx of 300,000 Palestinian refugees expelled in retribution from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Most Palestinian analysts would today concur that it was this defeat — more than any other single factor — that weakened the PLO into accepting the compromises on Palestinian rights embodied first in the Madrid and then the Oslo peace processes.

It was a mistake Arafat does not want to repeat. This time round the only trench he wants to sit in is that of the Arab consensus vis-à-vis the current US-Iraq stand-off. Apart from saying that the conflict in the Gulf will "complicate" the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, Arafat's public statements on the crisis have been at one with those of the other Arab front-line states, and particularly Egypt — i.e. that while Iraq should comply with UN resolutions, the conflict should be resolved diplomatically rather than by force of arms.

But this was not what the Palestinians in Ramallah and Benin were chanting. And, under pressure from America and Israel, there are signs that Arafat may be moving to rein them in. On Tuesday, the Palestinian *Al-Quds* newspaper quoted PA Police Chief Ghazi Jabali to the effect that henceforth all marches "that lead to violence and disturbances, such as the burning of flags" would be banned in the self-rule areas.

Such restraint may prove difficult to maintain with Fatah, the PLO's largest faction, as the main driving force behind the pro-Iraqi demonstrations. This is especially so should bombs start falling on Iraq, cranking up Palestinian frustration from small-scale demonstrations to mass confrontations with the Israeli army. In such circumstances — says Fatah leader and Palestinian Legislative Council member Dalal Salamah — Fatah would follow the path chosen by the people "whom no leadership can stop". But what would be the response of the PA? "The PA cannot be against their own people," she says. "They are not collaborators."

Preventing war

Upon his return from Iraq, the Arab League secretary-general unveiled a proposal to open 68 Iraqi sites for international inspection. Rasha Saad reviews this week's diplomatic moves

Egypt and the Arab League pressed ahead this week with efforts to avert an American military strike against Baghdad. President Hosni Mubarak dispatched Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to Paris for consultations with the French government, which also advocates a diplomatic solution to the Iraq-US standoff. Mubarak also received a report on Sunday from Arab League Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid following his return from Baghdad where he met with President Saddam Hussein.

On Sunday, Abdel-Meguid would only say that some sites in Iraq "can be visited or searched, subject to certain conditions which are currently under discussion."

But on Monday, he called a news conference to unveil a compromise proposal which, he said, was worked out in consultations between the Arab League, France, Russia and Iraq. Abdel-Meguid disclosed that Iraq is ready to open 68 sites to international inspection. Sixty of these sites can be inspected by members of the UN Special Commission [UNSCOM] for a period of two months. The remaining eight are presidential sites that can only be searched by a new commission, whose chairman must be a prominent international figure, chosen by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Abdel-Meguid said. UNSCOM Chief Richard Butler can serve as the deputy chairman of this new commission, whose members must be of various nationalities and include representatives of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Abdel-Meguid accused Butler and his team of being biased against Iraq, citing Butler's published statement that Iraq could destroy Tel Aviv by mounting biological or chemical warheads on its long-range missiles. Butler later said that he was misquoted.

"The Security Council met for three hours to criticise Butler for the remarks," Abdel-Meguid said. "Thus it is logical to say that UNSCOM was not acting impartially. However, we seek to turn over a new leaf. Iraq should comply with the Security Council's resolutions which it had accepted. But its sovereignty should be protected as well as its right to have the UN sanctions lifted."

Abdel-Meguid said that it was likely a diplomatic solution could be reached through the Security Council, but there were still obstacles in the way. In other words, he went on, a diplomatic solution is difficult "but not impossible." He declined, however, to specify the obstacles facing the proposal.

The main obstacle is likely to be opposition from the US and Britain, who have insisted that access by the UN weapons inspectors to Iraqi sites should be "unconditional and unrestricted."

Abdel-Meguid warned that a military strike against Iraq would not solve the problem but would merely complicate it further. He also predicted it would have disastrous consequences for stability in the region.

Abdel-Meguid was dispatched to Baghdad by President Mubarak, in his capacity as chairman of the last Arab summit held in 1996 in Cairo, following telephone consultations between Mubarak and 12 Arab leaders.

For his part, Moussa met with French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine in Paris on Monday. The two agreed on the need to press ahead with efforts for a diplomatic solution.

Egypt and France agreed "on the necessity for a diplomatic solution and of allowing enough time for this solution to take place," Moussa said.



Mubarak with Abdel-Meguid on Sunday, discussing the initiative to prevent a strike against Iraq

EC warns against Iraq-strike fallout

Jacques Santer visited Cairo for talks on breaking the stalemate in peacemaking and the approaching Egypt-EU partnership. Niveen Wahish reports on the visit

Jacques Santer, president of the European Commission, announced on Saturday he was confident that Egypt and the European Union (EU) would be able to finalise their partnership agreement before the termination of the British presidency of the EU next July. Following talks with President Hosni Mubarak, Santer said that Egypt and the EU would resume negotiations very soon and expressed optimism that any outstanding problems would be resolved.

Addressing a news conference in Cairo, the first leg in his first tour of the Middle East as EU commission president, Santer warned that any military action against Iraq would lead to further destabilisation of the region. This, in turn, would have adverse economic consequences for the region because it would chase away foreign investments, he said. "Foreign investments in the last couple of years have not been flowing in as strongly as when the (peace) process started in 1995," he pointed out.

Answering questions from the press, Santer affirmed that the problems of the region are best addressed from an economic perspective. Conceding that it was necessary to ensure Israel's security, he added: "The best way to guarantee the security of Israel is to ensure for the Palestinians the right to economic development."

Santer asserted that the EU holds the belief that economic prosperity is the key to a solution of the region's problems and, consequently, has chosen to support the peacemaking effort financially and economically. "We are the biggest donor of aid to the Palestinian Authority," he said.

Santer noted that the EU assisted the Palestinians by taking part in financing major projects such as a planned airport in Gaza and a planned "safe passage" between Gaza and the West Bank. Responding to criticism that the EU should provide greater support for the peacemaking effort, the president of the European Commission said: "We have always supported the peace process with political will and political proposals. What we lack is political involvement, which is why I am here."

Santer ruled out the possibility that the EU may impose economic sanctions on Israel to pressure it into softening its position on peacemaking. The EU, he said, does not join any economic blockade of any country unless it is dictated by the United Nations, such as the embargo imposed on Iraq. However, he added that the EU is trying its best to ease the suffering of the Iraqi people by supporting the UN secretary-general's attempts to increase the amount of oil Iraq is allowed to sell under the terms of the oil-for-food agreement. Moreover, he said, the EU provided more than 200 million ECUs in humanitarian aid to Iraq last year.

"Egypt has a leading role to play in the peace process," said Santer, who chose to start his Middle East tour with Egypt. In addition to President Mubarak, he also met with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Foreign Minister Amr Moussa to discuss, he said, "how we can break through the current stalemate, how we can advance for the future."

Santer explained that the EU's primary concern at the moment is that the stalemate may have a negative affect on the Barcelona process although "the two processes are independent of each other." The lesson drawn from last November's regional economic cooperation conference in Qatar is that a stagnant peace process could negatively affect the partnership agreement of the Barcelona process which aims to promote political stability and economic prosperity by establishing a free-trade zone between the EU and 12 south Mediterranean countries.

During his visit, Santer was scheduled to sign two agreements donating about $300 million to the primary education programme and to the Social Fund for Development. However, the signing was postponed until next week because of failure to get the paperwork ready in time.

Santer's tour includes Israel, the Palestinian self-rule areas, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.



Tantawi

Political strife in Al-Azhar

The Sheikh of Al-Azhar is acting to contain opposition to his policies within Sunni Islam's highest religious institution. Amira Howeidy investigates

Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, last week took the rare step of referring a number of prominent Azhar scholars, who publicly opposed his policies, to an interrogation committee.

The decision was viewed by the Front of Al-Azhar Scholars as an escalation of tension with the institution, while observers said it was a turning point in the policy of Sunni Islam's highest authority.

Tantawi took the decision following a controversy triggered a few weeks earlier by a meeting he had with Israel's chief rabbi, Yisrael Lau. The unprecedented meeting, and Tantawi himself, came under severe criticism, with opponents charging that it amounted to normalising relations with Israel. The Front joined the anti-Tantawi campaign, with its members assailing the Sheikh in statements to the press. The Front also issued a statement which denounced normalisation with Israel and affirmed support for the Palestinians, but did not make direct reference to Tantawi's meeting with the rabbi.

The Front is a non-governmental organisation, registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Its members include Al-Azhar officials, such as Yehia Ismail, who is the Front's secretary-general and a professor at Al-Azhar University.

According to Ismail, if the interrogation committee finds him guilty, he will be referred to a disciplinary board. "It may decide to fire me from Al-Azhar University altogether," Ismail told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "But this will not stop me or my colleagues from expressing our views, even if it costs us our jobs," Ismail said.

Tantawi's decision, Ismail added, was totally unexpected. "We never thought that expressing an opinion that contradicts the view of the Sheikh of Al-Azhar would mean that we will be interrogated or punished in such an undemocratic manner," he said.

Tantawi had taken another decision, two weeks ago, to dissolve Al-Azhar's *Fatwa* [religious rulings] Committee after it issued a *fatwa* condemning bank interests as usury, which is forbidden by Islam. While serving as the Grand Mufti of the Republic, Tantawi had ruled that bank interests were not against Islam.

According to Sheikh Farid Wassel, the incumbent *mufti*, Tantawi's decision to dissolve the *Fatwa* Committee was aimed at "regulating religious *fatwas* which should not emanate from two different authorities." The mufti is in charge of passing the religious *fatwas*.

Explaining why the Front scholars were summoned for interrogation, Ahmed Omar Hashem, president of Al-Azhar University, said that "anyone who voices an opinion opposing the nation's symbols, such as the Sheikh of Al-Azhar, or a consensus reached by the *ulema* of Islam, should be questioned."

The Front, Hashem said, "opposed Islam's viewpoint, expressed by the Islamic Research Academy, which is considered Islam's highest authority. This runs counter to Al-Azhar's regulations which stipulate that the behaviour of Al-Azhar's teaching staff should not run contrary to the teachings of Islam or any consensus reached by Islamic scholars. Anybody who does this should be summoned for interrogation."

Hashem added, "The Sheikh did not meet with the rabbi to normalise ties with him, but to prove to him that millions of Muslims reject and denounce violations being committed against Palestinians. He stressed the necessity of giving the Palestinians their rights. Those who attacked him were not even present at the meeting and did not know what the Sheikh told the rabbi."

Hashem claimed that Tantawi's opponents were influenced by the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and radical Islamist groups "who oppose Al-Azhar's enlightened trend."

Observers argue that although Tantawi exercised a legal right by referring the scholars to interrogation, his decision reflected an obvious desire to contain, if not eliminate, any opposition to his policies. This "centralisation of power" has created two camps inside Al-Azhar, each *gaining credibility from different quarters*, said Nabil Abdel-Fattah, editor of the annual *State of Religion in Egypt Report*.

The first, which is Tantawi's camp, is backed by the government while the second, grouping independent scholars, has populist support, Abdel-Fattah explained. "Although some may interpret this as a division and, therefore, a negative situation, I believe it is in the interest of democracy in the [Al-Azhar] institution. The Sheikh is no longer a sacred figure."

But, Abdel-Fattah added, "the fact that the Front's members were referred to interrogation simply because they opposed the Sheikh's meeting with the rabbi is an undemocratic step, even if it is within the Sheikh's legal right."

He pointed out that the Islamic Research Academy, which previously banned any contact with Israel, "now supports the Sheikh's meeting with the rabbi."

Abdel-Fattah said that neither the Front nor Tantawi should make political statements. "The Front, which is registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, has no right to make political statements," he said. "The same applies to Tantawi, who heads a religious institution. He is not expected to make political statements or mediate between the Palestinians and Israelis. But it is clear that both parties are playing political roles that are far from their duties as men of religion."



Nasser with Amer (centre) in 1957

Forever Nasser

A film featuring the public and private life of President Abdel-Nasser will not be screened unless parliament's culture committee agrees. Nesmahar Sayed takes a look behind the scenes

Following the success of *Nasser '56*, a film about former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the "tripartite aggression" that followed, Syrian director Anwar Al-Qawadri decided to produce a movie featuring Nasser's life — from his youth until his death in 1970. But the script triggered objections from Nasser's family, led by his daughter, Hoda, and from actress Berlanti Abdel-Hamid, the widow of Field Marshal Abdel-Hakim Amer.

The controversy went all the way up to the culture and *information committee of the People's Assembly last Sunday*. Chief censor Ali Abu Shadi, who approved the script, responded to criticism from deputies Mohamed Shawki El-Naggar, Fayda Kamel and Youssef El-Mandooh. Abu Shadi said that Culture Minister Farouk Hosni established a 33-man committee, chaired by Gaber Asfour, head of the Supreme Council of Culture, to scrutinise the script. The committee made 18 remarks about the screenplay which Al-Qawadri "had to take into consideration," Abu Shadi said.

Hoda Abdel-Nasser objected to some scenes in the film, particularly those dealing with her father's family life. Her comments were relayed to the director and scriptwriter who also took them into consideration, Abu Shadi said.

National Democratic Party MP Fayda Kamel, a former singer famed for her patriotic songs while Nasser was in power, said she had read the script and found it full of what she described as "contemptible" scenes. One, she said, shows Nasser speaking over the telephone with then Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.

Another objection made by Hoda Abdel-Nasser, who teaches political science at Cairo University, is that the film portrays the Israelis as superior to the Egyptians.

Kamel argued that *Nasser '56*, which was produced by state-owned Egyptian Television, was meant to "glorify the nationalisation of the Suez Canal, but what is the purpose of this new movie?"

Following a heated debate, Abu Shadi had to give in to the committee's demand that the film should not be screened unless committee members see it first and approve of its contents.

Abu Shadi made it clear that Al-Qawadri was given permission only to shoot the film. Approval to screen it is still pending, he added.

Amer's widow, Berlanti Abdel-Hamid, had other objections. She said her marriage to Amer is "sensationalised, as if I were Amer's mistress, not his wife." The relationship between Nasser and Amer, two close friends "is not based on real facts," she added. Moreover, the film accepts the official version that Amer committed suicide, but Abdel-Hamid insists that he was poisoned.

Al-Qawadri said that he was upset by the objections made to the film. "It is as if I were an Israeli agent," he complained. "I have respect for all those critics but they should be objective. I respect and love Nasser, who was a great Arab leader. But I cannot ignore the fact that he was also a human being who made mistakes and who had a family life."

Responding to criticism, Al-Qawadri said: "How can families have a monopoly on history? It's as if they know everything and nobody else should be allowed to make a contribution?"

Any objection to his Syrian nationality is also rejected by El-Qawadri. "I am an Arab above all else and Nasser was the president of my country during the Egypt-Syria union," he said.

Khaled El-Sawi was chosen by Al-Qawadri to play the title role because he has some resemblance to Nasser and also because he is little known. El-Sawi said he was "very exited" at having been chosen to portray Nasser for the screen, but added he had to read many books about Nasser's life, written from various perspectives, in order to do justice to the role.

El-Sawi believes that the controversy about the film should have been expected and was likely to greet any film that deals with historical events and characters. "Creativity is a main factor in drama but the truth should not be forgotten," El-Sawi said.

Yunan Labib Rizk, a historian of modern Egypt, said that, after reading the script, he spotted seven "historical" mistakes that had to be corrected. He concluded his report by stating that "the film has nothing new to offer." Rizk believes that Al-Qawadri was heavily influenced by a BBC documentary about Nasser's life.

Red Crescent in Zeinhom

MRS SUZANNE Mubarak on Sunday inaugurated the new headquarters of the Red Crescent Society, built in the working-class neighbourhood of Zeinhom for LE4 million. **Rania Khallaf** attended the ceremony.

In her opening address, Mrs Mubarak said the new headquarters should be viewed as a major achievement because it will provide advanced services to the inhabitants of Zeinhom and the neighbouring districts. She expressed satisfaction that public services were being improved day by day and expanded to the various governorates.

The five-storey building was built on 5,000 square metres and financed by non-governmental organisations and voluntary grants. Mrs Mubarak, who is board chairman of the Red Crescent Society, said it had made remarkable achievements in eliminating illiteracy and developing women's capabilities, especially in rural areas.



Pope demands justice for Iraq



POPE Shenuda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church, while in the US this week, spoke out against terrorism and US support of Israel and denied that Christians in Egypt are targets of discrimination, reports **Atef El-Ghamri** from Washington.

Addressing a gathering of Egyptian expatriates at the residence of the Egyptian ambassador to Washington last Sunday, Pope Shenuda said that President Hosni Mubarak was doing everything he could to ensure Egypt's future progress. He also said that all Egyptians condemn and oppose the actions of terrorists.

"The country is suffering from these terrorists," the Pope said, "and people in the US should not blame the government for the mistakes of individuals [terrorists]." He added that terrorists have killed both Muslims and Christians in Egypt and are "against Christians as much as they are against the government".

Shenuda described reports of discrimination against Christians in Egypt as "untrue exaggerations", and vehemently denied news circulated in the US that Christians are killed on the streets in Egypt.

Shenuda praised Mubarak's decision last month to delegate authority to governors concerning the renovation of churches, saying that this would "facilitate the work of Christians in repairing their churches". Since Ottoman rule in Egypt the building, renovation or repair of churches required a presidential decree, until last month's move.

During his talk, Shenuda criticised US "support" of Israel, which he branded as "racist and discriminated against minorities". He also said that the people of Iraq are "suffering", and called on the international community "to deal justly with the Iraqis".

Hosni explains Nefret's reappearance

Farouk Hosni defended his policies before the People's Assembly and offered a rare apology for what he called a "slip of the tongue." **Gamal Essam El-Din** reports

Yassin Serageddin of the opposition Wafd Party took Culture Minister Farouk Hosni to task on Sunday for agreeing to organise joint celebrations with France to mark the arrival of Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt 200 years ago. Serageddin also questioned Hosni about press reports that a rare statue of Queen Nefret, which is on display at the Louvre, was acquired by the museum as recently as last December.

"I want to know if these celebrations are intended to commemorate the French invasion and Bonaparte's arrival in Egypt or not, particularly since you affirmed that the celebrations are to be organised at state level," Serageddin told Hosni. "People want to know whether you are celebrating the expulsion of the French from Egypt or their invasion of Egypt."

As for Queen Nefret, Serageddin requested that Hosni explain "why the Ministry of Culture remained silent until the appearance of the statue at the Louvre was reported by newspapers." The opposition deputy also demanded an explanation from Hosni with regard to a statement attributed to the French minister of culture that the statue was acquired by the Louvre from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

In response, Hosni dismissed the claim that the Egyptian-French celebrations were intended to commemorate Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt. "Whoever celebrates this occupation should be considered a traitor," he said. "What we are celebrating are cultural relations with France. Celebrating cultural relations provides an occasion to cement political and social ties. It is an occasion to parade Egypt, with all its glorious history, before the French people. I want to emphasise that these celebrations will serve the interests of Egypt and that Egypt has excellent cultural products to sell to the world, particularly France."

Hosni caused an uproar when he compared "the French invasion of Egypt 200 years ago" to the "Egyptian invasion of Yemen in the early 1960s." To support his argument, he cited two articles written by Fouad Zakaria and Yunan Labib Rizk, which appeared in *Al-Ahram*.

Zakaria Azmi, chief of the presidential staff and a member of the Assembly, responded that the Egyptian intervention in Yemen was not an invasion. "Egypt went to Yemen at the request of the Yemeni people to support the Yemeni revolution," Azmi said. Hosni rushed to apologise for the analogy, saying it was a "slip of the tongue."

Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour surprised MPs by taking Hosni's side. Sorour contended that the celebrations should have been promoted as a "celebration of the cultural exchange between Egypt and France. There are a large number of French orientalists and intellectuals who believe that the contribution of Islamic and Arab culture to France's progress was monumental. This celebration should have been promoted as an occasion to celebrate how France has benefited from Egyptian and Arab civilisation and how Egypt and Arab culture have benefited from France," Sorour said.

Hosni rejected allegations that the statue of Queen Nefret had been stolen from the Egyptian Museum. "These allegations were made by a single journalist, and there is no evidence at all to support his claims," Hosni said. "We, for our part, have the necessary documents to support our position."

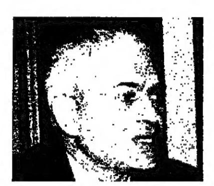
Hosni denied that the French minister of culture had ever said that the statue was bought from the Egyptian Museum in December. He produced a letter from Christiane Ziegler, curator of the Egyptian section at the Louvre, explaining how the statue was acquired by the museum. "The letter states that the statue was in the possession of a young French lady until 1920," Hosni said. "The [Egyptian] laws at the time allowed trading in archaeological items. The young French lady later sold the statue to the president of the high court of Geneva, who kept it in a bedroom in his palace until it was bought by some friends of the Louvre, people who are fond of buying archaeological items and donating them to the Louvre."

Serageddin shouted to Hosni to give him a copy of the letter "so as to see exactly what Ziegler said about the statue." Hosni complied.

He also explained that the Egyptian Museum has four replicas of the statue, affirming that since President Hosni Mubarak's rise to power in 1981, not a single archaeological artifact has found its way out of Egypt.

"On the contrary, we have recovered hundreds of archaeological items which had been smuggled out of the country in the past," said Hosni. Trading in archaeological items within Egypt was banned 20 years ago, he pointed out, and a law was passed in 1983 making all archaeological discoveries the property of the state.

Tourism still the biggest draw



Despite the slump following the Luxor massacre, tourism remains the nation's top hard currency earner, writes **Rehab Saad**

Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagui announced this week that tourism remains the top source of hard currency despite the decline in foreign travellers caused by the 17 November Luxor massacre. He cited Central Bank statistics which showed that tourism netted $3.8 billion in 1997, thus topping remittances from expatriates, oil exports and Suez Canal revenues.

Speaking at a bookfair seminar on Monday, Beltagui said tourism boomed following Israel's return of Sinai to Egypt in 1982. "Sinai was converted from a battlefield into one of the most important tourist areas," Beltagui said. "The government encouraged investors to put their money in it and they, accordingly, launched big projects and established new communities."

According to Beltagui, the number of hotel rooms nationwide rose from 18,000 in 1981 to 75,000 in 1997 and is expected to soar to 150,000 in 2001.

He said that a tourism boom causes 52 other auxiliary industries to flourish, offering employment opportunities to millions. But as a result of the tourism slump following the Luxor attack, many lost their jobs, he said.

Discussions at the seminar focused on ways of addressing the slump, domestic tourism and the promotion of Egypt.

"Soon after the massacre, we adopted a policy that said we should not underestimate what happened and, at the same time, should not exaggerate its consequences," Beltagui said. "We established committees to study the advisories issued by the various countries and the positions taken by tour operators. Accordingly, we divided the markets we are dealing with into groups: positive markets which were not affected, balanced markets, crisis markets and severe crisis markets. We decided afterwards how to deal with each."

A higher committee for the promotion of tourism was also established, which included businessmen, heads of industrial and bank unions, members of the Chamber of Commerce as well as tourism officials. "We came up with ideas, such as organising a shopping festival in summer. This will be included in the tourism calendar every year," Beltagui said.

Mohamed Nessim, a tourism expert, argued that the massacre did not have negative results and, in fact, had some positive ones. "It directed our attention to other markets that have been relatively forgotten, such as the Asian, Russian, East European and Latin American markets," he said. "I believe that our promotional efforts will get a positive reaction from the traditional markets soon, but I hope that new markets will not be neglected."

Beltagui concurred, stating that attention should not be confined to certain markets which, he said, could "control us" but should be directed to many others. "At the beginning of this decade, Egypt was dealing with a limited number of markets, but now we are dealing with others, although the focus remains on the traditional European market which accounts for 65 per cent of tourism in this country," he said.

According to participants in the seminar, domestic tourism provided a partial solution to the post-massacre crisis. "Before the massacre, hotel occupancy rates averaged 65 per cent. This dropped to 18 per cent following the attack," Beltagui said. "December witnessed the worst drop in occupancy rates, but it picked up again during the *Eid Al-Fitr* feast and mid-year holidays."

During this period, occupancy rate in Sharm El-Sheikh was 64 per cent, in Luxor 59 per cent and Aswan and Cairo 52 per cent each, Beltagui said.

"I believe in the necessity of domestic tourism so that Egyptians can get to know their country and their culture," he went on. "But we cannot depend on it because, being seasonal, it cannot build the economics of a tourism industry."

Public awareness of the importance of tourism was also highlighted in the seminar. "We asked the minister of education to include tourism in school curricula in order to promote student awareness of the importance of tourism," Beltagui said. "And through the press and the media, we hope to convey this message to the public."

Concluding on an optimistic note, Beltagui said: "We faced a lot of tourism crises in the past and overcame them. I believe that we can overcome this one, too."

MPs slam police behaviour in Al-Gurna

Members of the People's Assembly, angered by a recent riot in the village of Al-Gurna near Luxor, urged security forces in Upper Egypt to be less repressive and more disciplined

The defence and national security committee of the People's Assembly held an urgent meeting on Sunday to debate the factors behind a riot at Al-Gurna village, near Luxor, that took place on 17 January. **Gamal Essam El-Din** follows a parliamentary debate. The meeting, which was held upon the request of two Upper Egyptian MPs, Ahmed Abu Heggi and Mamdouh Moussa, concluded that the riot, which left four people dead and 29 injured, marked a setback in the relationship between Upper Egypt residents and security forces.

Abu Heggi accused police forces, who were trying to carry out a number of demolition orders, of opening fire on Al-Gurna villagers. He charged that the clash, which occurred only a few hundred metres from Hatshepsut's Temple, was another manifestation of police brutality and inefficiency. "It is deplorable that this clash occurred, especially at a time when hopes were running high that the solid dam between the people and security forces was about to collapse," said Heggi. "We thought that security forces had begun to learn the hard lessons of the Luxor massacre, but they proved again that they continue to be insensitive to the people's sentiments."

Reda Abdel-Aziz, first assistant to the interior minister, explained that security forces in Upper Egypt, and in other parts of the country, are entrusted with enforcing the law and administrative orders and do not act on their own. According to Abdel-Aziz, the drama unfolded when security forces were instructed by the Luxor City Council to carry out 19 demolition orders in Al-Gurna village. "As a matter of fact, 137 demolition orders [14 on the eastern bank of the Nile and 123 on the western bank] have been issued by the new chairman of the Luxor City Council since he came to office in November. Security forces, however, do not usually rush to carry out these orders. We take the utmost care before carrying them out. We have to examine the impact of these orders on social stability, especially after the Luxor incident. We also heed the government's instructions that people should be provided with alternative housing before any demolition orders are given," said Abdel-Aziz.

However, he added, security forces had to carry out 16 demolition orders in Al-Gurna village when the Luxor City Council insisted that these orders should be quickly implemented in order to protect the archaeological site near Hatshepsut's Temple from additional haphazard construction. "The orders were not aimed at demolishing houses but rather at removing piles of rocks and bricks which were to be used for construction near the archaeological site. This was a very simple task for police forces. It could be carried out in 10 minutes.

"This is why, on 17 January, a modest police force consisting of 24 men, two security trucks, and a bulldozer moved to carry out these simple orders. The police were armed with only automatic rifles and live ammunition. However, no sooner did the security forces arrive at the demolition scene when they were swamped by a crowd of more than 600 villagers, with the number increasing later to 3,000. The villagers began throwing rocks at the police, set fire to their vehicles and pushed the bulldozer into a nearby canal. As a result, 12 policemen — half the force — were injured, including the security chief, who was taken to Al-Gurna Hospital. Villagers even tried to enter the hospital and take the security chief hostage," Abdel-Aziz said.

In an attempt to contain the situation as quickly as possible, Abdel-Aziz said well-trained central security forces were quickly summoned from the city of Qena. In one hour, he said, they were able to disperse the crowd by using tear gas, and rushed the security chief out of the village hospital.

Following the clash, according to Abdel-Aziz, the chairman of the Luxor City Council visited the injured and extended condolences to the families of the dead. Abdel-Aziz said security forces received instructions from Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri to stop carrying out any new demolition orders.

"At the end, I would like to emphasise again that the performance of the security forces is governed by legal, democratic and constitutional rules. The current philosophy of the security authorities is that the utmost care should be taken in carrying out administrative orders. We always seek the opinion of the state security department ahead of the implementation of any of these orders," Abdel-Aziz added.

Abdel-Aziz's statement, however, failed to appease the MPs. Again, they criticised what they called the brutal and inhumane practices of security forces in Upper Egypt. According to Mamdouh Moussa, Abdel-Aziz's description of the clash deviated from the truth in more than one respect. "The fact is that it was security forces which opened fire on the villagers," he said. "We found that villagers were shot in the back. This means that they did not initiate the attack on the police. The brutal way in which security forces carried out the demolition orders provoked the people, forcing events to take a tragic turn."

Yehia Shalaan, MP for Luxor, said the Luxor City Council's chairman made a big mistake. "It was totally unfair to issue these demolition orders during this tense period. Besides, the security forces carried out the orders like a conquering army. I would like to draw the attention of high officials to the fact that Luxor's citizens will no longer tolerate being dealt with in such a repressive and humiliating way," said Shalaan.

At the end of the debate, the committee invited Interior Minister Habib Al-Adli to meet with them, discuss the dimensions of the clash and continue coordinating on security policies in Upper Egypt. "MPs would like to convey a message to Minister Adli: parliamentary deputies should be always consulted before security forces carry out any orders and launch anti-terrorist campaigns. Minister Adli promised to do this in previous parliamentary meetings and he has to keep his promise," said Shalaan.

Code of conduct to fight terrorism

Terrorism is no longer a local problem. An international seminar, hosted by Al-Ahram, on terrorism prevention warned against lagging behind in regional and international cooperation, reports **Amira Ibrahim**

Delegations from 45 countries gathered in Cairo early this week to study a code of conduct for international anti-terrorism cooperation and make plans for an international convention.

The two-day seminar was co-sponsored by Al-Ahram and the International Centre for Fighting Terrorism (ICFT), a non-governmental body established in Cairo last year.

The ICFT is concerned with researching and studying terrorism all over the world, documenting events and forming a database to analyse its origins and evolution. The ICFT held its first international seminar last year which discussed terrorism as a global phenomenon and different approaches to it.

"Combating terrorism on the national level, no matter how efficient it is, continues to have a limited impact considering the international nature of the phenomenon," said Mahmoud Murad, ICFT secretary-general and deputy editor of *Al-Ahram*.

Murad warned against letting regional and international cooperation lag behind.

"Any country is vulnerable and may fall between terrorism's teeth, and after it is done with, terrorism can go after another one," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Over two days of discussions, participants examined different definitions of terrorism and exchanged views on the proper criteria to confront it. "Terrorism is not a synonym for violence. It is a special form of premeditated violence aimed at creating a climate of extreme fear," stated British representative Paul Wilkinson, a St Andrews University professor. "It is directed at a wider target than the immediate victims. It is usually, but not exclusively, used as a weapon to bring about political change, but should not be confused with legitimate self-defence or national independence struggles."

A key aspect of fighting terrorism is countries denying refuge to terrorists and not letting them operate on home soil. President Hosni Mubarak has criticised Britain and other European countries for giving shelter to suspected Islamist terrorists who issue statements and publications from European offices.

"It is the problem of people using their residence in Western and European cities, not only London, as a base for organising and funding terrorism. I am sure that the present British government will implement a change in the laws to restrict terrorist activities on its land," Wilkinson added. "I think there is a lot of misunderstanding. The fact is that the British government is just as committed as the Egyptian government to fighting terrorism."

Seminar discussions highlighted the necessity of convening an international anti-terrorism conference under the umbrella of the United Nations.

The final declaration by seminar participants condemned all terrorist practices — making an exception of the rights of a people under occupation to carry out armed struggle against colonisation.

It also urged tighter bilateral cooperation and an open exchange of information and experiences. The declaration warned the international community against a new generation of terrorists who could possibly use chemical or biological weapons.

It called for governments to pressure the UN to arrange an international anti-terrorism conference to establish criteria for fighting terrorism.

The declaration also highlighted the importance of drying up the resources of terrorism — saying that refugee protection agreements should not be used to shelter terrorists.

The ICFT is due to have a meeting in Greece next May to study a final blueprint for the suggested international anti-terrorism convention.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



Palestinian demonstrators carry Iraqi and Palestinian flags and a portrait of Saddam Hussein during a demonstration in Bethlehem on Saturday (photo: Reuters)

Not so strange bedfellows

Palestinian human rights groups denied Israeli-leaked reports of persecution of Christians in self-rule areas. **Graham Usher** in Jerusalem investigates the curious alliance between Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and US-based Christian-Zionist groups

On at least one occasion during his recent trip to the United States, Israeli leader Binyamin Netanyahu was treated with real warmth. In a Washington hotel festooned with Likud Party banners, Netanyahu was urged by 500 adoring fans "not to give an inch" in his talks with President Clinton. "I accept the covenant of Abraham," Netanyahu was told by his host. "And I believe God blesses those who bless Israel."

This was not a meeting of US Likud Party members. Nor was the host an American Jewish settler. He was Reverend Jerry Falwell, evangelical leader of America's Christian Coalition of fundamentalist movements, whose illiberal stands on immigration and abortion have made them the *bete noire* of the Clinton administration and among whose supporters (according to Israeli journalist, Hemi Shalev) "are some of America's most *infamous anti-semites*". *Not that this seemed* to worry Netanyahu. "We don't relate indifferently or condescendingly toward any *of our friends*," he said.

America's Christian fundamentalists are certainly Netanyahu's friends. Aside from *supporting his hard-line policies* in the US Congress, "Christian friends of Israel" have donated thousands of dollars to right-wing groups in Israel to further Jewish settlement in the West Bank. More recently, they appear to have worked hand in glove with Netanyahu in a cynical attempt to defame Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority (PA).

On 24 October, Israel's *Jerusalem Post* newspaper leaked a "secret" report prepared by the prime minister's office on the "PA's treatment of Christians in the [Palestinian] autonomous areas". Palestinian Christians, the report claimed, were subject to "relentless persecution" by the PA. It described how "Christian cemeteries have been destroyed" and lists cases where PA security forces "have targeted and intimidated Christian leaders and Palestinian converts to Christianity," forcing them to serve as "propaganda mouthpieces" for Yasser Arafat and the PA.

Despite rebuttals by Palestinian Christian leaders — including the US representative of Jerusalem's Latin Patriarchate — the "secret report" gained airplay, surfacing in newspapers like the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Washington Times*. So intense was media interest in the PA's alleged persecution of Christians *that the Palestinian Human* Rights Monitoring Group (PHRMG) — a Palestinian organisation with a proven *track record of uncovering human rights* abuses, especially in the PA autonomous areas - decided to do its own research and, *in the words of PHRMG director, Bassem* Eid, "set the record straight".

On 20 January, it did. In a report based on its own fieldwork, the PHRMG concluded that "reports of widespread PA persecution against Christians are utterly without foundation". It found no evidence that Christian cemeteries had been destroyed. Nor could the PHRMG locate a single case where a Palestinian Christian (whether a "leader" or not) "suffered from a human rights violation caused by the PA as a consequence of the victim's religion".

The only concrete examples of abuse the PHRMG unearthed were of five Palestinians recently converted to Christianity who had been imprisoned and, in one case, tortured by PA security forces. But, says Bassem Eid, even these cases appeared less the result of a directed PA policy "from above" against Christian converts than instances of "regular" PA human rights abuses common throughout the autonomous areas. Moreover, although "converts from Islam faced harassment, there is no evidence that this harassment... differs from other cases in which people (land dealers, collaborators) have suffered hostility from their local community," says Eid.

There are around 50,000 Palestinian Christians in the Occupied Territories, most of them (85 per cent) belonging to either *the Greek Orthodox or Roman Catholic* churches. In recent years, however, a handful of Palestinians (between 60-100, ac*cording to PHRMG) have converted from* Islam to a Protestant Christian evangelicalism akin to that of the American Chris*tian Coalition.*

The main tribune of this brand of Christianity within Israel is the International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem (ICEJ), a "Christian Zionist" organisation based in West Jerusalem. The ICEJ's views on the Israeli-Palestine conflict echo those of the Christian coalition and were eloquently expressed in one of its brochures.

"The Scriptures tell us about the regathering of Israel back to her own land, which God will fulfil," writes the ICEJ. Therefore "Judea and Samaria" (i.e. the West Bank) "are essential parts of the land promised to Israel and linked with the history of Israel... They are places in the very heart of the Land of Israel, the cradle of Jewish civilisation: they are the towns, villages, mountains and valleys which give the Bible its contemporaneity". It is on the basis of this "literalist" reading of the Bible that ICEJ not only opposes territorial compromise with the Palestinians, but actively encourages Jewish settlement in the West Bank as a portent for "Christ's second coming".

According to the PHRMG, all five of the converted Palestinians subscribed to this ideology. Two were in regular contact with David Ortiz, an American evangelical pastor based in the West Bank Jewish settlement of Ariel near Nablus. Ortiz, says PHRMG, was *the source of the prime minister's* "secret report". Given these facts — and while not excusing the human rights abuses the five suf*fered from their community and the PA* — "it is no wonder that Palestinians find evangelical missionary activity political threat*ening" concludes the PHRMG.*

For Bassem Eid, the most regrettable thing about the myth of the PA's "persecution" of Christians is that it has diverted attention from the very real human rights abuses that routinely occur in the autonomous areas. These sometimes affect Palestinian Christians - though not because of their religion - but are mainly targeted at Palestinians suspected of belonging to Islamist movements like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Needless to say, the ICMJ has yet to raise the case of these Christians with either the prime minister's office or the international media.

The woes of Wau

For a few hours last week, the besieged southern Sudanese garrison town of Wau was in the control of opposition SPLA forces. It was later recaptured by government troops, but the SPLA has declared the definitive fall of the city imminent. **Gamal Nkrumah** and **Rasha Saad** review the latest developments in this beleaguered region

Last week, the Sudan People's Lib*eration Army (SPLA) announced* that the strategic garrison town of Wau had briefly, for the space of a few hours, fallen under the control of SPLA forces. Both official Sudanese government and SPLA sources corroborated the fact that government troops later recaptured the town, the capital of southern Sudan's most populous province. Bahr Al-Ghazal has more people than the south's other two provinces (Equatoria and Upper Nile) combined.

The capture of Wau is widely seen as a turning point in the 15-year Sudanese civil war. Wau fell to SPLA forces for a few hours, but Sudanese government troops were able to recapture the airport and the military garrison. However, the SPLA then cut the railway line between Wau and another neighbouring garrison town, Aweil, thus preventing the arrival of government reinforcements.

Droughts and the search for greener pastures had led northern Muslim tribes like the Baggara and the Rezaqiyat to venture into the better-watered Bahr Al-Ghazal. Cattle rustling, tribal skirmishes and the resulting land disputes helped radicalise the native southerners. It was in this context that many of the original inhabitants from the province joined the SPLA. The ethnic Dinka, southern Sudan's largest ethnic group, are concentrated in Bahr Al-Ghazal.

Wau is the second largest urban centre in southern Sudan after Juba. If it does fall to the SPLA, it will be a serious setback for the Sudanese government. Wau is situated close to the oil fields of Bentui, and its loss would threaten the Sudanese government's main supply of locally-produced oil, a valuable source of foreign exchange. Over the past few years, Sudanese army generals have enriched themselves by trading in timber and other natural resources of the area. They were able to transport the loot free of charge on Sudanese army warplanes and made fat profits.

Fighting has also erupted simultaneously in eastern *Sudan*. The Sudanese government has accused Eritrea, its eastern neighbour, of directly *backing* Sudanese armed opposition groups. Farouq Abu Eissa, Sudanese opposition spokesman and head of the Arab Lawyers Union, told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "We want a peaceful settlement that ends the rule of the National Islamic Front, but is seems that armed resistance is the only way out of the Sudanese predicament."

SPLA leader John Garang announced that *General Kerubino* Kwanyin Bol, who leads an SPLA splinter group, headed the SPLA attack on Wau. *Kerubino* had allied himself with the Sudanese government and was until *recently* collaborating with Reik Machar, head of the South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) who now chairs the Sudanese government's special council responsible for southern Sudanese issues. But a serious personal animosity between Kerubino and Machar made it very difficult for the two southern warlords to work together. While Machar is an ethnic Nuer, Kerubino, like Garang, is an ethnic Dinka. Machar and Kerubino were never able to cooperate militarily, even though they were both until recently sworn enemies of Garang's SPLA. Garang recently disclosed that he has been working closely with Kerubino for the last two months and that together they had tricked the government into believing that there were wide-scale defections from the SPLA ranks.

"Kerubino waited for the right time to strike at the government," Daniel Kodi, the SPLA chief representative in Cairo, told the *Weekly*. "He was warmly welcomed back by the SPLA. But the government troops in Wau took revenge on the civilian population and a bloodbath ensued in the city. Government troops are butchering innocent civilians. All southerners are now suspect. The situation is very tense at present, but SPLA forces have surrounded the town and are tightening the seige of Wau. *The city should fall* [to the SPLA] in the next few weeks. Government forces will not be able to hold out for much longer."

The Sudanese government described Kerubino's defection back to Garang's faction as "unjustifiable treachery". An official Sudanese army source recently said that Kerubino contacted the Sudanese armed forces in Wau and asked them to send reinforcements to deal with the large number of southern Sudanese returnees who had deserted SPLA ranks. It later transpired that Kerubino's statements were a ploy to lure government forces into a trap. When the government forces ordered the returnees to hand over their weapons, they refused, and fighting erupted. At first the government forces were routed. But Kodi told the *Weekly*, "Sudanese government troops were not caught entirely unawares. It appears that government forces heard a rumour about an imminent attack on Wau and fled the city. They later regrouped and, strengthened by reinforcements from Khartoum, managed to stave off total defeat. When SPLA forces first entered the city they easily outnumbered the defenders."

Kodi said that SPLA troops from *the surrounding countryside*, which is mostly controlled by the SPLA, are heading towards the beseiged city. "They are *closing in* on Wau from several directions to the east, west and north of the city." A month ago, reports emanating from Wau told of an estimated 500,000 refugees, fleeing the battlefronts and devastated countryside and converging on the garrison town. The reports, which have not been corroborated by independent sources, said that troops are deserting the SPLA *en masse* in the Mirial Baia area of Bahr Al-Ghazal, Kerebino's base of operations region. Yet the recent defection of Kerebino and the "revelation" of his connivance with Garang must cast doubt on the veracity of these allegations.

According to Abdel-Samie Zeineddin, former head of the Sudanese department of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the only solution to the southern Sudan civil war lies in finding a formula that will give the south some form of self-rule. Zeineddin said that the recent attacks demonstrate both the strengths and the limits of the military capability of the SPLA. "Even if Wau is captured by the southerners, it will be recaptured [by government forces] in a month's time," he predicted.

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**

The dangerous and the absurd

The drums of war against Iraq have been beating in the United States with unprecedented fervour. The debate, writes **James Zogby** from Washington, is not whether Iraq should be bombed or not, but over the magnitude of the strike

For several weeks now, the drums of war have been beating in the United States. It appeared inevitable that if the Iraqi government continued to refuse unconditional and unrestricted UNSCOM arms inspection, that the country would be subjected to "massive and *sustained" bombardment.*

This view was fed not only by repeated ultimatums and pronouncements by various administration leaders and spokespersons, but also *in opinion columns* appearing in the daily US press.

As late as two weeks ago, the only debate apparent in the US media was between those who argued that air power was sufficient to "do the job" and those who argued that such strikes must be followed by an invasion of ground forces. This was the logical outcome of a discourse that had been largely limited to either right-wing ideologues or military analysts.

In some instances, the public discussion had become not only dangerous but also dangerously ridiculous.

A group of 18 conservatives, for example, have been arguing for the president to send in divisions of ground forces to invade, and presumably, to occupy Iraq. And Republican speaker of the House, Newt Gingrich, last week stated that if the Iraqi leader refused to agree with unlimited UN inspections "*we will have to replace him* with a regime that will."

It is ironic that while many of these same so-called analysts reject the notion of *assassinating Saddam Hussein on the grounds* that such an act would be illegal (there is a US law that forbids the assassination of foreign leaders) and immoral ("not in keeping *with our ethical standards*") they, *nevertheless*, support the "massive and sustained" use of aerial bombardments of the country and the possibility of invasion by ground forces.

It is precisely this one-sided discussion of military options without any consideration of political — or civilian — consequences that has caused more thoughtful analysts to react in the past few weeks.

Some, both on the right and the left, have begun to challenge the narrow apolitical views that have dominated the debate up until now. Questions have been posed of those who encourage the military option:

— What will be the outcome of a military strike? Will it change the political situation within Iraq? Will it make the regime more compliant with UN inspections — or will it harden the regime's resolve?

— If a ground invasion occurs, what next? How will a unilateral US invasion of Iraq be viewed in Iraq or in the broader region? How long would the United States sustain an occupation force? What could it accomplish? And for how long would US public opinion support such a move?

— What would be the political consequences of either a bombardment or occupation? How would Arab and Muslim public opinion, not to speak of world opinion, react to the civilian casualties resulting from such actions? What would the impact be on US allies and interests in the broader Middle East? On stability and security? On the already fatally wounded *Middle East* peace process?

In addition to these new questions being asked, somewhat belatedly, *traditional and not so traditional* opponents of war have begun to mobilise. Peace Action, the nation's largest mainstream coalition of religious and peace organisations, has called for *demonstrations. Some members of Congress and the Senate* support them. And, a number of influential Republicans, former officials in the Nixon and Reagan administrations have also begun to *speak out urging caution and calling for a new policy toward* Iraq. John McLaughlin, for example, a former Republican White House official and now host of two popular and influential public affairs *television programmes*, has, for a *number of weeks now*, been challenging the tenets of the current debate as "immoral and dangerous."

Last week, in an effort to broaden this developing debate, I led a delegation of Arab American leaders to a White House meeting with National Security Adviser Samuel Berger. We presented to the White House a consensus Arab American *view that* "the negative consequences of a military confrontation at this time would be to inflict greater suffering on the Iraqi people and to damage US allies and interests in the Middle East... In addition, bombing Iraq will create tension and instability in the region and may prove fatal to the Middle East peace process. For those reasons and because there is no certainty that the military option would generate compliance with UN resolutions or produce political change in Iraq, we feel the military option is totally unacceptable."

We made it clear that, "as Arab Americans, we support the elimination of weapons of mass destruction throughout the entire Middle East, and we also support the enforcement of all UN resolutions that apply to the Middle East. We are concerned US credibility is at risk in the region and that the United States is viewed as applying a double standard in the Middle East." Our position, we continued, was that "UN inspectors must be allowed to do their job."

Instead of sustained bombing or an invasion of Iraq," we called for "diplomatic alternatives that put pressure on the Iraqi govern*ment to comply with* inspections but do not negatively affect the civilian population of that country." We noted that "we support UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's proposal to dramatically increase the UN oil-for-food *programme. Economic* sanctions have not had an impact on the Iraqi regime, they have only hurt the people of that country."

Our efforts received extensive national press exposure and generated a number of other national media appearances in the following days.

Helping to change the public debate is of critical *importance*, since it provides a more reasoned consideration of policy options. The danger of the one-sided debate is that it boxes the administration into a more limited set of options.

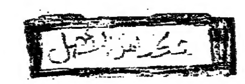
It is clear that the administration, while firm in its resolve to see that weapons inspections continue unrestricted, is somewhat uncomfortable with the narrower debate. Last week, Secretary of De*fence William Cohen* noted that there was no certainty that the military option would result in Iraqi compliance or be successful in ending the regime's development of weapons of mass destruction. *Possibly in reaction* to recent hard-line positions coming from Moscow, or as a result of the flurry of diplomatic activity being conducted by many US allies, or even as a result of the less than *conclusive results of* Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's visits to European and Arab capitals, the US position has more strongly than ever begun to affirm that it "prefers a diplomatic solution" to *the standoff with Iraq's leader.*

The situation remains dangerous. To the same degree that Saddam Hussein remains, as I have previously argued, a "measure of the *depth of alienation* from the West" and, therefore, able to inflame extremist passions of those who are alienated and who feel betrayed, he also remains the "Willie Horton" of US domestic politics. As *such, any US* politician who appears to make concessions to the Iraqi leader will be buried under an avalanche of public criticism.

There is a frightening disparity between the current debate in the *United States* and that in the Arab world, and most of the rest of the world.

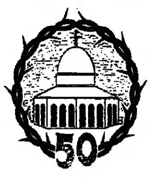
It may yet be possible to avoid the devastating human and political consequences of a military confrontation. For that to occur, a diplomatic solution must be found that provides for the UN weapons inspectors to continue in a manner consistent with their mandate and for guidelines to be established, as described by one former Bush administration official, that will be both "firm and yet fair." At the same time, the US policy debate must be opened up to allow for political acceptance of such a diplomatic resolution. Failure on either front could prove fatal to chances for a peaceful resolution.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.



Chronicles of the fall

Hala Sakakini narrates the experience of living in Jerusalem on the eve of the fall of the western part of the city, while **Mona Anis** recovers the wider Arab context from the pages of *Al-Ahram*



Years of dispossession

In 1948 Hala Sakakini was a young school teacher living with her family, headed by her father Khalil Sakakini, in their villa in the fashionable quarter of Katamon in the southern part of Jerusalem, now part of West Jerusalem. There were four residential areas in the southern part of Jerusalem — Talbieh, Namamra, Katamon, Lower Baq'a — that together formed a garden city, as they consisted mainly of villas surrounded by gardens. Beginning from 1946 the Zionist gangs (the Stern and the Irgun Zvai Leumi) were waging a ruthless terror campaign in Jerusalem against both the British Mandatory Government and the Arab population of the city. As a result the city was divided into security zones each surrounded by barbed wires and manned by British soldiers. Of those days she remembers: "In order to move about in Jerusalem, one had to have an identity card, which stated in which zone one was residing, and permits to other zones. Everywhere there were checkposts where one was stopped by British soldiers who examined one's identity card and permit." Hala Sakakini and her family were forced to flee their house in Katamon, from which they made their way to Cairo, on the last day of April 1948, a few hours before the neighbourhood fell to the hands of the Zionist gangs. Below are extracts from her January and February diary, included in her book Jerusalem and I, *published in 1987 in Jerusalem by Habash Printing Press.*

Monday, January 5th, 1948: Yesterday we had our last first aid lesson. It was held in the Catholic Club in Mr. Anton Albina's house. The number of girls attending these classes has dwindled considerably since our first lesson. Nevertheless, there were quite a few present yesterday. At the end of the lesson we divided ourselves into two groups — those who are ready to go out at night, and those who want to do day duty only.

We had terrible weather last night - rain, lightening, thunder and a violent, howling wind. About a quarter past one we were awakened by an awful explosion that lighted the sky and shook the house. This explosion was followed by shots that sounded so near we had to leave our beds and creep to the corridor near the bathroom where we all sat on the floor in the cold for about half an hour until it was somewhat safe to go back to bed. Of course, we could not sleep the rest of the night.

Early in the morning we understood from our neighbour, Miss Kukon Tleel, who had gone out in the night to do First Aid, that the explosion was in Hotel Semiramis in Katamon not far away from us.

I put my clothes on and, according to Dr Freij's instructions, hurried to Villa Maurice, just across the street from Hotel Semiramis, to help the nurses with the wounded. The eastern wing of Hotel Semiramis was completely destroyed. It was nothing but a heap of rubble. In spite of the pouring rain and bitter cold a large crowd had gathered at the scene. All faces were drawn and pale with sadness and fury. Women wept and men muttered curses.

All through the day British soldiers kept searching among the rubble for those who were missing, but they would not allow any of the bystanders to help. When night came there were still many under the rubble.

Around ten this morning Aunt Nada Farraj and Mary Sfeir passed by and we went together to the Catholic Club to roll bandages and prepare other necessary things for first aid. There were other girls and ladies there and we stayed working until one o'clock. In the meantime, Aunt Melia, with a delegation of ladies from Katamon, called on the Iraqi consul and asked him to send for soldiers from the Arab Legion to protect himself and his neighbourhood. By nightfall five Arab soldiers had arrived at the consulate and we all sighed with relief as these are more effective than 30 men of our own.

All day long you could see people carrying their belongings and moving from their houses to safer ones in Katamon or to another quarter altogether. They reminded us of pictures we used to see of European refugees during the war. People were simply panic-stricken. The rumour spread that leaflets had been dropped by the Jews saying that they would make out of Katamon one heap of rubble. Whenever we saw people moving away we tried to encourage them to stay. We would tell them: "You ought to be ashamed to leave. This is just what the Jews want you to do; you leave and they occupy your houses and then one day you will find that Katamon has become another Jewish quarter!"

Around half past five, when it had become dark, all the young men, girls, children and even some of the women of our neighbourhood began to set up the barriers at both ends of our street. All of us carried heavy stones from the vacant plot behind our house and used them to fill the empty barrels with which we closed our street at both ends. The children enjoyed the whole business immensely, and the adults I believe had their fun as well.



On January 21 the two main banners on *Al-Ahram*'s front page declared: "Attack across the Lebanese borders on a Kibbutz near Acre", and "A bomb targeting Ghandi misses him but injures nine who were with him."

Thursday, January 8th, 1948: Yesterday was Christmas but nobody remembered the occasion. We are far from peace to remember. For the past few nights we have slept very little. The men stay up all through the night to keep watch. That it should come to this! We never dreamt that we should ever live in such conditions. Everybody looks pale and tired.

Yesterday in the afternoon Dumia and I passed by Jeanne Zapheriades and we went together for a walk inside Zone A (the only available safe place for walks nowadays). When we arrived home at about four, we heard terrific explosions coming from the direction of the Old City. These were followed by volleys of shots. Later we heard the news over the radio and understood that a large bomb was thrown in the square just outside Jaffa Gate by Jews who were passing through in a police armoured car. About 17 persons were killed and 38 wounded.

Very early this morning we received a telephone call from Uncle Jaleel Abdo who told us the sad news of his sister's death yesterday evening as a result of wounds received in the explosion. What fate! She had to die this way on Christmas day. At about a quarter to eight both my uncles, Tata and Aunt Melia left for the Old City to attend her funeral.

At about one o'clock this afternoon we began to hear strong shooting from somewhere near the Old City, but we could not tell exactly where. It continued all through the afternoon and into the night. At about three in the afternoon, Aunt Melia called up to say that she, Tata and my uncles are going to remain in the Old City for the night as it is impossible for anyone to use the road leading to Katamon and Upper Baq'a as it passes between Montefiori and Nabi Daoud, and these are the quarters that are exchanging fire continuously. All cars have stopped running along this road and Katamon is temporarily and partly cut off from the Old City.

Tuesday, February 10th, 1948: At about one o'clock this afternoon when we were just closing school and the boys were either on their way home or still waiting for the buses, heavy, strong firing broke out from all directions in Jerusalem. Father and I could not find a taxi to take us home, so we had to walk home all the way through Zone A to Katamon. It was raining and very cold but we did not mind as we had something more serious to think about. All the people we met on our way warned us that it was dangerous for us to go on because of the shooting all along the way. At the zone gate the British soldiers said they wouldn't advise us to proceed as it would be a risk to walk in the streets. Father, however, was determined to reach home as soon as possible and so we kept marching onwards in spite of everything. Thank God, we're still alive. The streets were empty except for a few people who stood with their backs close to the walls of buildings. In short, our journey was an adventure that cannot be forgotten.

Some of the day students had to stay in school until 5 o'clock in the afternoon when the buses resumed their trips and it was somewhat safe to ride in them.

Thursday, February 12th, 1948: Had it not been for the frequent firing and loud explosions that we hear night and day, our daily life would have been unbearably monotonous. Exactly the same things happen every day: I go to school in the morning, come back for lunch at one, the Sfeirs, Tata and uncles come in the afternoon and stay until six when they go home to have supper. They are back at about a quarter past seven. We talk about the same things, make the same kind of jokes, till it is newstime at nine o'clock. After the news we all disperse and so to bed. I'm afraid this is going to lead us into nervous breakdowns sooner or later.

At about half past eight in the evening we were all sitting around the fire in our dining room and I was saying: "I feel we're going to have a quiet evening", when we heard a loud explosion. It was followed by heavy firing which sounded so near we had to switch off the light and hurry to a safer place in the house. George Sfeir turned on the radio and we spent an exciting half hour listening to the messages which were exchanged by the police headquarters and the various armoured cars.

After it had calmed down somewhat, I said: "I don't think there'll be another attack tonight, do you?" Everybody agreed that it was improbable. We were mistaken however, for about three in the morning we were awakened by loud explosions, seventeen of them, two of which were as loud as that of the Semiramis Hotel.

Portents and prophecies

Looking through the pages of *Al-Ahram* for the first month of the year 1948, the modern reader blessed (or damned) with hindsight cannot help but pick up on the countless portents of impending disaster. The great expectations nourished during the first two years following the end of the Second World War among the peoples of the ex-colonies, and in particular by the Arab people, were beginning to sour. The November 1947 UN resolution stipulating the partition of Palestine, Britain's announcement that it was going to pull out of Palestine by May 15 1948, the escalation in violence between the Arabs and the Jews in Palestine, and the prospect of war looming over the region, all combined to alter the priorities on the national agendas of the Arab countries, especially Egypt and Iraq where the struggle for national independence had been resumed with a new impetus following the end of the war.

In both Iraq and Egypt the national struggle prior to November 1947 had been focused on one goal: evacuation and independence. Throughout the years 1946 and 1947, successive Egyptian governments struggled to negotiate — without success — an agreement with Britain which would have replaced the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. Meanwhile, civil disturbances erupted periodically in most of the country's major cities and towns calling for independence, inevitably leading to the downfall of one government and the formation of another, each of which hoped it might succeed where its predecessor had failed.

Thus when *Al-Ahram* announced on its banner of **January 16, 1948** that an Anglo-Iraqi treaty had been signed the previous day in Portsmouth, included in the coverage of the event was a Reuters analysis describing the treaty as a model to be emulated in the Egyptian case.

On January 18, in the lead story of the front page, *Al-Ahram*'s special correspondent in London revealed that sources close to the British Foreign Office had disclosed to him that "the British government considers that the Anglo-Iraqi treaty establishes a precedent to be followed by treaties with the other countries of the Middle East and is a model for those treaties to follow." Later in his story, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent added: "Top officials in the British government think that it is possible to persuade the Arab countries to understand and appreciate Britain's policy in Palestine, and that more solid Anglo-Arab treaties can be erected on the ruins of the old policy."

In anticipation of the end of Mandate rule in May, Britain was trying hard, during the first two months of 1948, to reach agreements with the Arab countries that would bind them in to what was officially termed "A Middle East Regional Defence System". The news item below the banner of the issue for **January 18** revealed that preparations were underway in London for drafting treaties similar to the Anglo-Iraqi treaty with Saudi Arabia, Trans-Jordan and Yemen. Along with Egypt and Iraq, these countries together represented five of the then seven independent Arab states which had formed the Arab League in 1945 (the other two being Syria and Lebanon).

The next day, *Al-Ahram*'s front page was again dominated by news of the embryonic treaties and of how the Jordanians were expected in London the following week, while Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia might make the journey at the beginning of February. On **January 20** a news item on the front page revealed that the Anglo-Iraqi treaty was not faring well back home in Iraq. However, members of the Iraqi delegation who had initialed the treaty, and who were still in London, assured *Al-Ahram*'s correspondents that some opposition back home was to be expected and was unlikely to change the course of events.

On **January 21** the two main banners on *Al-Ahram*'s front page declared: "Attack across the Lebanese borders on a Kibbutz near Acre", and "A bomb targeting Ghandi misses him but injures nine who were with him." With the exception of the Ghandi drama, which was fast approaching its tragic close, and which had been closely followed by *Al-Ahram* since the day (January 14) the Mahatma had begun his fast in protest at the sectarian disturbances which were then shaking the subcontinent, the front page was almost exclusively devoted to matters Palestinian. The main story dealing with the attack on the Jewish Kibbutz included a statement by Abdel-Qadir Al-Husseini, the leader of the Arab troops in Palestine. According to Al-Husseini, "Palestine was at a crossroads," and his fighters "[would] spare nothing in their organised struggle for their rights, though they [would] avoid the treacherous means the Jews resort to in the battlefield, since the history of the Arabs and their traditions and morality forbid treachery." Husseini concluded his statement by saying: "We still need arms and equipment, and the duty of the Mujahdeen is to fight on the battlefield, while any other matter is the concern of the Supreme Arab Authority."

Even the news item that day on the newly-initialed Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, reporting an escalation in the anti-treaty demonstrations in Baghdad, linked those demonstrations to the events in Palestine. *Al-Ahram*'s special correspondent in Baghdad reported: "Informed circles here say that Iraqi anti-Zionist sentiments have had a major influence on the escalation of the demonstrations in Baghdad in protest against the new treaty between Iraq and Britain." He continued: "As is well known, some Palestinian Arabs have voiced their rejection of a new alliance between Iraq and Britain at a time when the Arabs in Palestine are being killed." The *Al-Ahram* correspondent concluded his report by stating: "It would seem, to judge by the demonstrations in front of the American installations in Baghdad, that the [UN] partition resolution has played a leading role in stirring up feelings."

On the second page of the same issue of **January 21**, under the headline "An Act of Royal Generosity", we read that "His Majesty the King [Farouk] expressed the supreme wish that no parties be held or festive decorations be put up on the occasion of the Royal Birthday (February 11), out of respect for the present conditions in Palestine". *Al-Ahram* commented, "no doubt this generous royal sentiment will be received with the greatest appreciation in Egypt and throughout the Arab countries. May God keep the Great Farouk a treasure and bastion of Arabism."

On **January 23** the main story on the front page carried the official Arabic text of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, while a Reuters report from Baghdad below the story, headlined "A dangerous Iraqi decision" declared that "A statement by the Royal Palace said that Crown Prince Abdel-El-Ilah had invited a number of former prime ministers, dignitaries and representatives of the various political parties to exchange views about the new Anglo-Iraqi Treaty". The report reveals that after five hours of deliberations the meeting concluded that "the new treaty does not fulfill the national aspirations of Iraq" — and the rest is a forgone conclusion.

On **January 25** *Al-Ahram*'s banner blared: "Iraqi Treaty in the Hands of Fate", while below the main story was a UP report from Damascus, headlined "A proposed Arab Charter banning Arab countries from entering into agreements with any of the major powers". According to the report, "informed sources in Damascus said that the Lebanese government has proposed to the Saudi Kingdom that an Arab charter preventing any Arab country from signing a pact with the four major powers should be signed, and that an envoy carrying the reply of king Saud is expected soon in Damascus." The report continued: "It is common knowledge that if King Saud answers in the affirmative, the Lebanese government will present a similar proposal to the Egyptian government."

News of the demonstrations in Iraq continued to dominate the front page the following day, while the banner of **January 28** announced the resignation of the Iraqi cabinet and the killing of dozens of people as the demonstrations drew to a bloody close. The main banners for **January 29** announced "End of bloody demonstrations in Iraq", "Call for the formation of a government representative of the people", and "Participation of 300,000 Iraqis in a procession mourning those who were killed during the demonstrations".

On **January 30** the banner carried the news that the task of forming a new cabinet had been entrusted to the Shi'te leader Al-Sayed Mohamed Al-Sadr, over an interview with him in which Al-Sadr said that his main concern was with "the national feelings of the Iraqi nation and the Arab interest, as well as with the future of the Arabs in the light of developments in the world arena."

On the same front page of **January 30**, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in London filed a report to the effect that a "top British official, who is a well informed source on Iraqi affairs, said that the recent crisis in Iraq could be attributed to two factors. First, the question of Palestine, which every Iraqi perceives to be an Iraqi question. Second, the mishandling of the situation by the Iraqi delegation in London, as well as by the Iraqi authorities inside Iraq, who showed weakness in dealing with the psychology of the mob."

Al-Ahram's correspondent ended his story by saying that the British official "threatened that if Arab officials did not act firmly then the whole Middle East will turn into an inextricable problem over the coming few months, because of the question of Palestine, and cooperation between the Arabs and Britain may fall victim to that decline" — prophetic words if ever there were.

When the news that the Mahatma Ghandi had been assassinated while on his way to pray for peace was announced the following day, it resonated with a funereal tone encompassing far more than the death of one man in India. As violence continued to escalate in Palestine, the news of Ghandi's murder announced on the banner of the front page of *Al-Ahram* of **1 February** sounded like a requiem for all the great hopes of decolonisation. Those few months following the end of the Second World War, when India was the model looked to by all the peoples of the imperial colonies as they tried to invent or imagine a new independent future for themselves, seemed to have been buried alongside the man who more than anybody else incarnated the ideals of tolerance and peace.

To the Editor

Not true?

Sir-With reference to the 1948 Ben Gurion quotation in *Al-Ahram Weekly* (1-7 January 1998, left-hand top of page 5) concluding "... we will settle our forefathers' account with Egypt, Assyria and Aram," I have not located this quote in any source available to me. The reference to settling his forefathers' account with Egypt does not ring true. Could you provide me with your source. I look forward to your reply. I would prefer not to have to record that there was no answer.

Dr Joseph Lerner
Jerusalem

The Ben Gurion quotation comes from a readily accessible — and indeed obvious — source: the biography of the man himself by Michael Bar-Zohar. The quotation is to be found in page 166 of the English translation of the book, entitled Ben Gurion, *translated by Peretz Kidron, published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1978.*

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Letters may be edited for length and clarity; they should be addressed to M. Anis, Al-Ahram Weekly, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 587 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

No more cold Turkey

As tension mounts once more in the Gulf, Galal Nassar **analyses the implications of the recent Turkish-Israeli military manoeuvres for the strategic future of the region**

The military cooperation agreement signed between Turkey and Israel on 23 February 1996 should not have come as a surprise to observers of the history of Turkish-Israeli relations.

Turkey was the first Islamic nation to recognise the state of Israel in 1949, and the two countries established full diplomatic relations in 1952. In the mid-fifties, the notion of a Middle-Eastern security framework comprising Turkey and Israel was first mooted, only to meet with vehement Arab opposition. Turkey then moved to exclude Israel and include Iraq in the security scheme, which ultimately gave rise to the Baghdad Pact, comprising Turkey, Britain, Iraq and Pakistan.

In 1958, the mounting impetus of the Arab nationalist movement, epitomised in the creation of the United Arab Republic uniting Syria and Egypt and in the Iraqi revolution led by Abdel-Karim Qassem, led to the collapse of the Baghdad Pact. In response, then Prime Minister of Israel David Ben Gurion initiated a policy of rapprochement with Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, the countries which surrounded those Arab countries that bordered on Israel. The so-called "Countries of the Rim Charter" provided for the highest levels of political, economic, technological and military cooperation between Turkey and Israel that had been seen up to that point.

In the mid-sixties, Turkey shifted its stance toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the period leading up to the June 1967 War, it supported the Egyptian position in closing the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli ships. Following the war, Turkey supported UN Security Council Resolution 242, calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories they had occupied and affirming the right of all nations in the region to exist within secure and recognised boundaries. At the same time, however, the Turkish government took pains to maintain relations with Israel.

With the Arab victory in the October 1973 War, Turkey discovered that it was in its interests to strengthen its relations with the Arab world. In 1975, it recognised the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It also supported the UN resolution supporting the Arab cause and Arab rights, and, in November 1977, it voted in favour of the UN General Assembly resolution that Zionism is a form of racism. This shift in Turkish policy was largely dictated by Turkey's ambitions to open up the markets of the wealthy Arab oil-producing nations to Turkish products.

Turkey's policy of rapprochement with the Arab world continued throughout the 1980s. In 1980 the Turkish government lodged a vehement protest against Israel's decision to annex East Jerusalem and declare Jerusalem the undivided capital of Israel. In June of the following year, it condemned the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor and later in December it refused to recognise Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights. Turkey recognised the Palestinian state when it was first declared by the Palestinian National Council in Algeria in November 1988, and loudly condemned the brutality of Israeli repression during the Intifada.

In spite of this shift in policy, Turkish-Israeli relations in the 1980s underwent several important positive developments. The two countries strengthened their cooperation in combating terrorism when, in the wake of their invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Israeli government produced documents indicating links between various Palestinian organisations and anti-government groups in Turkey. Also during this period, the Turkish government arranged for the immigration of 30,000 Iranian Jews to Israel. In 1987, Turkish Prime Minister Turgot Urzal proposed a massive regional project to supply water to the countries of the eastern Arab world as a means to stimulate peace in the region. The so-called "Waters of Peace Project" had originally been conceived by Israel.

Following the second Gulf War, new geostrategic considerations brought about another shift in Turkey's foreign policy. When Turkey joined the international alliance to liberate Kuwait, Prime Minister Turgot Urzal announced, "Iraq is going to lose this battle and Turkey must stand with the winning side in order to emerge the stronger when the Kuwaiti crisis is over." With the effective removal of Iraq from the regional balance of forces and the relative weakness of Iran at the time, Urzal began to dream of reviving the Ottoman hegemony. He pressed for the "return" of Mosul and Kirkuk and the partition of Iraq into three states — Arab, Kurdish and Turkish.

In 1991, the Turkish government interpreted the Madrid peace conference as a signal to step up its relations with Israel. The conference was followed by a spate of official visits between the two countries. Then, in 1993 Israel and Turkey signed an agreement to conduct joint military training exercises the following year and a secret security pact to promote bilateral cooperation in the field of intelligence.

The Oslo Accords of 1994 removed any last reservations on the part of the Turkish government about promoting its relations with Israel. In November 1994 Prime Minister Tensu Ciller made the first official visit by a Turkish head of state to Israel, during which she referred to the "strategic partnership" between the two countries. The visit was followed by another at the beginning of 1995 during which the Turkish and Israeli prime ministers signed several military and security agreements.

1996 saw a major qualitative escalation in Turkish-Israeli relations. In February of that year, the Turkish deputy general chief of staff and the director of the Israeli Ministry of Defence signed a military training pact. According to the agreement, both sides are entitled, jointly or independently, to use Turkish air space to conduct air force training manoeuvres. It also calls for the exchange of information and expertise in the field of air force training and, more significantly, gives Israeli aircraft permission to use Turkish air bases. The agreement also envisages exchange visits between naval units, naval patrol operations in the eastern Mediterranean and annual joint naval manoeuvres in which American units are also to participate. In addition, the agreement also stipulates that Israeli expertise will be used in restructuring and arming Turkish land forces, and in reorganising and augmenting the fire power of its mechanised infantry and its anti-tank missile forces.

The pact also regulates the exchange of regional strategic intelligence obtained by the two countries. Israel is to provide Turkey with information from its spy satellites and with satellite intelligence obtained by Israel through its strategic cooperation accord with the US. In exchange, Turkey has pledged to provide Israel with any information at its disposal concerning the activities of Palestinian groups, and particularly Islamist groups still committed to armed struggle against Israel. These include Hamas and Islamic Jihad as well as Hizbullah in Lebanon.

The agreement further entitles Israel to establish electronic warfare land bases in Turkey, equipped with surveillance, jamming and radar equipment. In addition to obtaining information, these electronic surveillance bases are intended to emit early warning signals and to help locate Syrian radar and military control centres. In a second phase, Israel is to help Turkey complete its electronic surveillance network so as to enable Turkey to monitor military build-up along its borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran. Israel is also to place satellite and other electronic intelligence at the disposal of the Turkish army to assist it in combating Kurdistan Labour Party insurgents.

Cooperation in military training, according to the agreement, calls for complete coordination in all aspects of planning, training and military preparation, the exchange of expertise and information on military training; educational exchanges, exchanges between military delegations to observe the manoeuvres; and the exchange of military documentary films. On the industrial level, Israel will modify 137 F-5 fighters and 155 F-4 fighters in order to transform them into Phantom 2000s. Israel will also equip the Turkish TRAC 2A and 2B frigates with Israeli Barak short-range surface-to-air missiles; furnish the Turkish air force with equipment for pilotless aircraft; establish a company to manufacture Israeli anti-ballistic missiles to counter Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian attacks; and study the feasibility of establishing joint production of the Israeli Arrow missile.

The Israeli-Turkish-American manoeuvres must be seen in a number of contexts. They are, of course, intrinsically connected to the deadlocked Arab-Israeli peace process, now stalled on all its bilateral and multilateral tracks. They are also an escalation of the Israeli response to Syria's increasing military capacities, particularly in the realm of ballistic missiles, now equipped with chemical warheads, and to her attempts to conclude an agreement with the Russian Federation to construct a nuclear reactor. In addition, the manoeuvres are a reaction to Syria's support for the Hizbullah in southern Lebanon and to strategic cooperation between Syria and Iran, which is on the point of obtaining ballistic missiles and non-traditional weaponry capable of threatening Israeli territory. Syria and Iran have also sought to bring Iraq and other Arab countries into an anti-Israeli alliance.

Turkish-Israeli military cooperation is also a part of Israel's drive to strengthen strategic cooperation with non-Arab powers in the region, notably Eritrea and Ethiopia. This drive constitutes part of the current Israeli government's strategy to redraw the political, strategic and economic map of the region in Israel's favour and, at the same time, to bolster its key status in American strategy towards the Middle East and adjacent regions (Central Asia and the Horn of Africa).

Turkey has recently sought to improve relations with the Arab world, particularly Egypt and the Gulf countries, which had deteriorated due to its relations with Israel. Nevertheless, all the signs still point to growing strategic cooperation between Turkey and Israel. The past three months have seen an intensification of meetings between security officials of both countries for the purposes of exchanging information and discussing their assessments of threats to their respective interests in the region. Officials from both countries have repeatedly issued statements reaffirming the strength of the strategic cooperation between Israel and Turkey. In addition, during the visit of the Israeli minister of defence to Ankara, which coincided with the opening of the Islamic summit conference in Tehran, both sides announced that they rejected the statement issued by the summit condemning any Islamic nation that cooperated with Israel.

Various provisions of the Turkish-Israeli military cooperation agreement have recently been implemented. During his recent visit to Ankara, the Israeli defence minister inaugurated an eavesdropping station set up in Turkey for monitoring military movements in northern Syria and in Iraq. The exchange of satellite intelligence started following the visit of Turkish officials to the Israeli satellite centre. Israel has begun up-dating and modifying Turkish aircraft and other joint armament programmes have been put into effect. Meanwhile, Turkey has stepped up its incursions into northern Iraq, having availed itself of intelligence provided by Israel and the US.

The Israeli-Turkish manoeuvres must also be seen against the background of increasing US-Israeli strategic cooperation. The US has made some effort to exert pressure on the Israeli leadership to revive the peace process, particularly on the Palestinian track. Yet Washington continues to demonstrate unqualified support for Israel through unprecedented levels of strategic cooperation. Frequent visits of Israeli military and security officials to Washington, constant communication between the Israeli and US ministers of defence, and repeated affirmations by US officials of America's commitment to Israel's security and to its qualitative military and strategic superiority bear witness to this fact.

In addition, American forces have been deployed in the Negev, where joint Israeli-US manoeuvres were conducted to coincide with the latest US-Iraq crisis. The US secretary of defence announced recently that the Israeli nuclear arsenal does not pose a threat to American interests or to those of its allies. The F-15 I aircraft pact has moved into operation and the first consignment arrived in January, piloted by a joint Israeli-American team. In addition to supplying the Hayitz anti-missile system with American manufactured radars, Congress also recently approved a bill to increase allocations for the Nautilus anti-Katioucha missile system. More recently, the US furnished the Israeli land forces with Millers artillery missiles.

The Israeli-Turkish military agreement must also be seen against the broader background of developments in the Arab world. The Arab countries' insistence that Israel must abide by the principles of the peace process and the agreements that have been signed to date, in conjunction with the Lebanese resistance actions against Israeli occupation forces in southern Lebanon, have combined to build up pressure on the Israeli leadership. Simultaneously, the growing tide of Arab solidarity and cooperation has proved effective, not only in strengthening regional economic bonds, but in supporting the Arab parties in the peace process, in furthering the drive to bring other international parties, notably Russia and the EU, into the peace process in order to offset America's one-sided sponsorship, and in staving off military action against Iraq and the partition of Iraqi territory.

Tangible manifestations of this trend were the recent Arab boycott of the Doha economic summit conference, the success of the Arab countries in securing the passage of the UN General Assembly resolutions condemning the Israeli settlement drive in the Occupied Territories and calling for the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East; and the success of Egyptian-led efforts to consolidate the truce in Somalia. Another significant regional development has been Iran's success in fighting off US pressures to isolate it internationally and regionally, while continuing with the implementation of its military development programme.

As for Turkey, Turkish-Greek tensions over the Aegean and Cyprus as well as the part that Greece plays in obstructing Turkey's acceptance into the EU have also constituted factors imparting additional impetus to Turkey's decision to step up military cooperation with Israel.

It seems likely that Turkish-Israeli relations will continue on their present trajectory, not only for the reasons given above, but also to a great extent because of their shared belief in a common enemy beyond the borders of both countries. Syria has never conceded the Turkish annexation of the border zone of Al-Iskandarona, while Israel continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights. Water has been a crucial cause of acrimony between Syria and both Israel and Turkey. Turkey controls the sources of the Tigris and Euphrates and its large water projects threaten Syrian water security, while Israeli occupation of the Golan enables it to dominate the sources of the Jordan.

Both Turkey and Israel consider Syria, as well as Iraq, immediate enemies and hold that both countries foster terrorism. Israel accuses Syria of complicity with Hizbullah elements in southern Lebanon while Turkey accuses both Syria and Iran of harbouring the insurgent Kurdistan Workers Party. Turkey and Israel are also alarmed by Russian arms deals with Syria, Iraq and Iran and are actively seeking to obstruct any attempt on the part of Iraq and Iran to build up a non-traditional arsenal.

Israel and Turkey share a similar colonialist mentality and aspirations to regional hegemony. Israel is intent upon retaining direct control over the West Bank and Gaza, while Turkey maintains its support for the northern Cypriot Turks. And since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey has emerged, along with Israel, as a major regional power in the Middle East. Another similarity that breeds like-thinking is the presence of large minorities in both countries. Turkey has frequently been called to account for its actions against the Kurds who make up approximately a quarter of its population, while Israel has come under increasing international scrutiny for its human rights abuses against the Palestinians.

The Turkish-Israeli manoeuvres, already provocative in themselves, could not have taken place at a more sensitive time, given the prevalent tensions in the region. True, the participants in the manoeuvres — the US, Israel and Turkey — took pains to affirm that their joint exercises were not directed at any particular party, stressing, moreover, that they would not be including combat manoeuvres. Indeed the non-military sounding name — "Mermaid" — appears to have been intentionally chosen to placate the many countries that had voiced protests, which includes Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Iran and Russia. Nevertheless, the question these manoeuvres pose goes beyond their declared aims to the very heart of the secret cooperation pact between Turkey and Israel. Given the content of the contractual obligations binding the military establishments of these two countries, there can be no doubt that the level of military-technological cooperation is that of a strategic alliance that threatens to upset the balance of powers and prejudice the interests of other nations in the region.

Perhaps it is the set of agreements signed in May 1996 that bears the most ominous implications for Arab national security. These agreements address three primary areas of cooperation: firstly, the creation of a joint strategic affairs working group, which can be joined by Jordan at a later stage if it wishes (which explains why Jordan was the only Arab state to send observers to the manoeuvres); secondly, full cooperation in the fields of intelligence and security devices; and, thirdly, training the Turkish army in how to conduct a war of attrition against the Kurds.

In addition to the establishment of Israeli electronic surveillance stations along the Turkish borders with Syria, Iraq and Iran, the agreements also provide for the expansion of Israeli intelligence activities from the Mossad base in Istanbul. One area of Mossad activities has been to create a spy network aimed at intelligence gathering and reconnaissance in Syria. Because the agents in this network are so difficult to detect, Syria has refused to grant entrance permits to Turkish drivers of petroleum lorries. Turkey has responded in kind.

The most dangerous aspect of these agreements is that they grant the Israeli air forces' access to Turkish airspace. They have therefore enabled Israel to regain the manoeuvring space it lost when the Sinai was returned to Egypt and thus provide them with a theatre of operations roughly equivalent to that of Syria, Iraq and Iran. Moreover, the agreements provide for the stationing of fighter planes at one of the Turkish front-line air bases, in close proximity to the Syrian, Iraqi and Iranian borders, allowing for extremely rapid air penetration of these countries.

This last element, above all, means that the Arabs are faced here with a fully-fledged strategic defence alliance, comprising a broad range of areas of military and technical cooperation and coordination. Nor can they eliminate the eventual possibility of cooperation between the respective land forces, which may initially occur through the mutual observation of manoeuvres. All this has been publicly endorsed by the US, which in itself is an ominous token of the objectives of this alliance, in which the exchange of expertise, the unification of naval and air combat tactics and the training of command units in strategic planning and coordination are intended to enable the military forces of these countries to accomplish military assignments with the highest degree of efficacy.

As such, the Turkish-Israeli manoeuvres are one of the methods adopted by the US to establish an alliance similar to the military alliance promoted by US Secretary of State Foster-Dulles in the 1950s. However, in this case the objective is no longer to contain the Soviet Union and prevent it from reaching Arab oil sources, but rather to create a new version of NATO, built around the two most militarily powerful states in the region, in order to reconfigure the map of the Middle East.

Certainly Washington has found in the current climate in the region some compensation for the loss of the "enemy" against which it had invested half a century of military build-up. In other words, the US is attempting to generate a Cold War atmosphere in the Middle East and invest its allies, such as Israel and Turkey, with the capacities to conduct that war on its behalf. Naturally, the US anticipates that the Arab and Islamic nations which feel threatened by this alliance will rush to create a joint defence pact to counter it.

In spite of the relatively limited scale of the joint US-Israeli-Turkish naval manoeuvres, the first of their kind, their timing, together with Jordan's participation as an observer, has several ramifications. Firstly, they constitute a fundamental step towards implementing the US's strategy to create a naval/air power, comprising Israel and Turkey, that will have the capacity to dominate the eastern Mediterranean. In this respect, these manoeuvres constitute another link in the development of a joint training programme between the four countries aimed at strengthening their strategic cooperation. Turkey and Israel constitute the cornerstones of this programme, while Jordan is to serve as Israel's gateway to the Arab Gulf. Thus the region also recently saw the Turkish-Israeli air force manoeuvres of 1-5 September 1997 in Israel, joint Israeli-Jordanian naval manoeuvres in the Gulf of Aqaba, and joint US-Jordanian training exercises, in addition to enhanced Turkish-Jordanian military cooperation.

While the partners are attempting to convey the impression of good will, under cover of catchwords such as "openness" and "confidence building", in effect these manoeuvres are intended to gauge the intensity of reactions in the Arab/Islamic world and to determine how they might affect US, Israeli and Turkish interests. In a similar vein, Jordan took pains to stress that its participation was in response to an invitation from Turkey, not from Israel, and that its observers were posted to Turkish, not Israeli, ships. Nevertheless, Jordan continues to develop cooperative relations with Israel in various domains in order to garner additional American economic, military and political support.

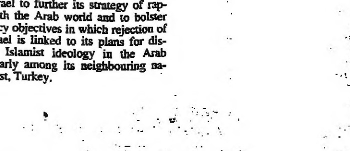
The reactions to the manoeuvres, to date, also have important implications. That these reactions in the Arab/Islamic world have been confined to verbal criticism, however vehement, suggests that the scope of joint military training will continue to expand in the near future, since the countries involved in these exercises would not perceive in these criticisms an immediate threat to their interests. Meanwhile, for the moment it appears that the Arabs cannot look to Europe for support in this matter, as Europe's relatively apathetic reaction indicates its unwillingness to take a stance that might be detrimental to its own strategic ties with the US.

At the same time, the divisive climate generated by the manoeuvres may well serve the interests of other parties. Russia, for example, is taking advantage of the opportunity to restore relations with various countries in the region. Iran meanwhile continues to exploit America's backing for Israel to further its strategy of rapprochement with the Arab world and to bolster its foreign policy objectives in which rejection of peace with Israel is linked to its plans for disseminating its Islamist ideology in the Arab world, particularly among its neighbouring nations — not least, Turkey.





Clockwise from top left: map of the Eastern Mediterranean; Israeli Defence Minister Mordechai with Turkish Chief-of-Staff Ismail Hakki Karadyi; Kamel Atatürk; two scenes from the recent manoeuvres; an Israeli Arrow missile; Israeli Brigadier-General Yedidia Ya'ari mapping out the exercise for reporters



هكذا من الأصل

Tony Blair's American dream

The precise nature of the relationship between Blair's Britain and Clinton's America matters almost as much as that between Clinton and Monica Lewinsky, writes **Gavin Bowd**

With British Prime Minister Tony Blair's four-day visit with US President Bill Clinton, the special relationship between Britain and the US seems to be very special again.

Only recently, Britain appeared to be left high and dry in the New World Order — a small island state whose future lay with Europe, while its big American ally looked to new backyards *such as the Pacific Rim*. However, the conflict with Iraq and the Monicagate scandal have made Clinton's British centre-left buddy an essential ally for the president. Blair was received as if he were the leader of a world superpower, and the visit was the occasion for mutual congratulation on their integrity and firmness.

But events may conspire to blow up in the faces of both leaders. The visit of Blair was meant to show the American public that there was more to government than Clinton's *alleged affair with Monica Lewinsky*. Europeans were not interested in tittle-tattle about the president's private life. Instead, Blair was to discuss serious issues such as Northern Ireland and the two countries' isolated stand in favour of robust military action against Iraq. Blair was also a young, Christian family man, popular with his people, who had said all the right words at the funeral of Princess Diana. Clinton hoped that such cleanness would rub off on him.

Blair also had much to gain from such a visit. *Blair is in love with the idea of himself* as a strong leader, like Margaret Thatcher. He needs a good war to erase forever the image of 'Old Labour' defeatism, pacifism and unilateralism. Together, the Democrat Clinton and the New Labour Blair were to show the world that the centre left would "kick butt" too. With their threats against Iraq, Clinton was taking on the dimensions of Roosevelt (himself a notorious womaniser) and Blair's press secretary, Andrew Campbell, promoted comparisons between the British Prime Minister and Winston Churchill — saying that Saddam's dispute with UN weapons inspectors was on the same level as the rise of Hitler.

The four-day political love-in at the White House also showed the extent to which Blair has Americanised the Labour Party and is trying to extend this as a whole. At the last election, New Labour adopted the Democratic campaign strategy: promotion of a "presidential" leader; emphasis on image over message, with policies, if any, being led by opinion surveys.

Since his election, Blair is trying to implement a Democrat agenda: welfare to work; tax credits for the poor; a 'flexible' labour market and a morally authoritarian crime and social policy. To this can be added Blair's contribution to the dumbing down of British culture: the schmaltzy sentimentality at Diana's funeral, and the fact that Blair's 'Prince of Darkness', Peter Mandelson, has gone to Disneyland to get ideas of what to put into the Millennium Dome — the future home of Britain's lavish year 2000 celebrations.

But this meeting of minds with America is not unopposed. If the threat against Iraq is supported by the other political parties, it has been strongly attacked by left-wing Labour MPs. For Tony Benn, Britain and the US "are not the international community" and should not act without the agreement of the UN. For fellow MP Tam Dalyell, military action would be unjustified and extremely dangerous. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "there can be no guarantee, however hi-tech the weaponry, that some missiles would not go off course or fall short. I'm quite certain that among the targets will be sensitive installations located near Karbala. If one of those beautiful mosques were so much as damaged, the result would be that British Consulate offices throughout the Middle East would be in great danger of going up in flames. The risks military action would bring us in the Arab world are formidable."

The visit to Washington may spell the beginning of a series of humiliations for Tony Blair. Unlike Churchill, who "stood alone" against a much more sinister threat, today's British prime minister is following US foreign policy and offering it modest military support. If anything, in the past week, Blair has served as a human shield helping Clinton dodge questions about 'Monicagate'. Their final press conference demonstrated the failure of this tactic: no questions were asked of Blair — even though Clinton tried to divert discussion onto their common policy on Iraq. Instead, in a frightening reflection of the prurience and shallowness of the US public, 70 per cent of questions were concerning doubts about Clinton's honesty over his relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

Tony Blair has made a double gamble on his special relationship with the US. He may soon find himself in an armed conflict with no sure alliances and no clear war aim, which will destroy British interests in the Arab world (and, ironically, promote the influence of the very old-style left-wing government in France). Blair may also be hoist by his own petard if Clinton's honesty is undermined by the facts.



British Prime Minister Tony Blair *(photo: Reuter)*

Africa's clock is ticking

In Tripoli, Harare and Dakar, important initiatives are being made at a propitious time, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Africa's leaders have signalled that they cannot watch the continent's slow dance to disaster and do nothing. Admitting to a serious problem often entails finding a radical solution. With three African summit meetings taking place almost simultaneously, it has become clear that Africa's politicians have come to acknowledge that they have a complex problem on their hands. Civil wars do not arise overnight, but it has taken African leaders many years to acknowledge their scale and seriousness. People do not kill people; warlords order the killings and private militias commit unspeakable atrocities.

Last week, at three separate venues, African leaders came together to put an end to bloodshed. The political culture of fear and intolerance is claiming numerous victims in Africa. The continent's incessant wars are taking their toll on hapless civilians. Militias are springing up all over. There is no shortage of angry and unemployed youngsters eager to join up.

The immediate cause of conflict cited in most of Africa's civil wars is invariably ethnic and tribal in nature. But the real culprit, the underlying cause, is deteriorating economic and social conditions, coupled with rising popular expectations for greater democracy and higher standards of living. Unemployed workers who went on the rampage in the Zimbabwean capital Harare last week protested against the recent sharp rise in prices of Zimbabwe's staple food, maize meal, even as the city prepared to host a summit on conflict resolution.

Last Monday, in the Libyan capital Tripoli, eight African nations agreed to establish a new political and economic grouping for Sahelian and Saharan African countries with headquarters in Tripoli. Some 15 African nations border the arid wastes of the Sahara Desert and the drought-stricken southern fringes of the Sahara called the Sahel. Even though the majority of these nations are among the world's poorest and least developed, a few oil exporters, most notably Libya, have a relatively high standard of living. The Sahara, which encompasses much of northern, central and western Africa is, nevertheless, rich in mineral resources, fossil fuel deposits and vast underground water reservoirs that have not been tapped.

Welcoming the delegates, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi called for the need to "believe passionately in Africa." Burying the Saharan hatchet was high on the agenda. Tripoli has had three territorial disputes in the past with its southern neighbours. The most serious was when the Libyans occupied Chad's Aouzou Strip. However, relations between Libya and its southern neighbours have improved considerably in the past few years. "We need to work together to confront poverty and underdevelopment urgently," the Libyan leader told the visiting African heads of state.

The three-day Tripoli meeting was organised by Gaddafi and attended by Sudanese President Omar Hassan *Al-Bashir. Chadian President Idriss Deby, Niger President* Ibrahim Bare Mainassara, and Mali President Alpha Oumar Konare. Egypt was represented by Minister of Labour and Emigration Ahmad El-Ammawy. Tunisia was represented by its state secretary for Africa and Maghreb affairs, Al-Sadiq Fayyala, and Burkina Faso by its minister for water resources, Salif Diallo. Algeria and Nigeria were both invited but neither attended.

The countries that did attend agreed to establish a presidential council, an executive body, a secretariat, a development fund and an economic, social and cultural council. UN sanctions imposed on Libya topped the political agenda. *Libya's Al-Madani Al-Azhari* was elected secretary-general for the new grouping and Chad's Adam Toughoi his deputy. The new grouping represents a population of over 130 million people. Not surprisingly, politically-sensitive issues like human rights were not discussed at the Tripoli summit — a forum essentially composed of African heads of state.

Last Friday, in the Senegalese capital Dakar, however, human rights violations and war crimes were intensely debated. African government ministers, representatives of human rights organisations and legal experts agreed to set up an African-based permanent international war crimes court. Funded by American billionaire and philanthropist George Soros, and sponsored and attended by European Union Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Emma Bonino, the participants explored ways to minimise pressure and interference from world powers. The Dakar Declaration, issued at the end of the week-long event, pledged that the new African initiative should "operate without being undermined by the actions of the UN Security Council." Senegalese Premier Habib Thiam told delegates from 20 African countries about the "need to prevent and, if necessary, punish genocide perpetrators and crimes against humanity, which are also major obstacles to our economic and social development efforts." The tragic lessons of the ethnic Tutsi holocaust in Rwanda was not lost on the participants.

"No place matters more in Africa than the Great Lakes," declared US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during her African tour two months ago. Albright was referring to the explosive ethnic mix of the region. Almost one million ethnic Tutsis perished in Rwanda's 1994 massacres and war crime tribunals have been set up to punish Hutu militiamen who committed the atrocities. Tanzania is suspected of backing Hutu militias bent on overrunning Tutsi-controlled Burundi. Uganda, Rwanda and Congo are seen as Tutsi-dominated. The Mai-Mai militias of Kivu, eastern Congo are hunting down Tutsi leaders. Would Museveni's Uganda, patron to both Kabila's Congo and Kagame's Rwanda, stand aloof? Uganda, widely regarded as the linchpin of the region, is the darling of Western leaders and international financial institutions. Controlling the sources of the Nile, Uganda supports the quest by John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army for a secular Sudan.

The Tripoli and Dakar conferences came ahead of a summit meeting in the Zimbabwean capital Harare, attended by 16 heads of state who will debate different ways to resolve ethnic conflicts and civil wars in Africa. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, the current chairman of the Organisation of African Unity, is edgy about any international interference in African affairs. Many other African leaders gathering in Harare are sensitive to Western criticisms of Africa's human rights record.

Washington talks high-mindedly about launching democratic reform in Africa. But it fails to realise that the root cause of violence and human rights abuses by undemocratic regimes is widespread and crippling poverty. Civil wars in Africa accelerate the rate of urbanisation as refugees flee devastated rural backwaters and head for the peripheries of large urban centres. The upsurge of violence among the continent's restless and jobless youth is a worrying phenomenon. African American civil rights leader Jesse Jackson, US President Bill Clinton's special envoy for the promotion of democracy in Africa, expressed horror at the untenable levels of violence in Kenya, Congo and Liberia, countries he visited last week.

Bill, Bibi and Monica

It may seem easy to dismiss speculation as to the reasons why Netanyahu's talks with Clinton should coincide with the outbreak of the US president's latest sex scandal. But is it? **Mohamed Wahby** in Washington asks a few probing questions





Bill Clinton



Bibi Netanyahu



Monica Lewinsky

Was it really a coincidence? Many Arabs asked this question openly — and even some Americans, albeit less openly — when the new and most-devastating-yet sex scandal involving the American president and former intern Monica Lewinsky broke out just as Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu arrived in Washington last month for the most crucial and difficult peace talks since the fall of the Labour Party in the Israeli elections. But when a visiting Arab journalist addressed the same question to an American official, he got a terse answer: "I am sorry, but you are just doing what most Arabs do. You are trying to find an easy explanation for a complex situation, by taking refuge in conspiracy theory!"

That, of course, was not a very good or a very polite answer to a visiting journalist. Some of us do tend to lend credence to his accusation. Indeed our experience with the West, particularly since the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and later with Israel, may only have deepened our suspicions towards the others. But are we the only victims of the conspiracy theory? According to *Newsweek*, popular belief in conspiracies has been growing among Americans; and according to a survey published by *George* magazine, three-quarters of Americans even "believe that the government is involved in a conspiracy."

After all, it is not we Arabs who first cried "conspiracy" when the new sex scandal threatened, as it was reported mechanically, to have the President impeached. It was his wife, Hillary, who spoke first — and quite articulately — of "a vast right-wing conspiracy" against her husband. She, of course, may have her own reasons. Few presidents have evoked so much hatred among the mushrooming ranks of the political and religious conservatives. But the timing of the new scandal has not played as big a role in her calculations as it did in those of some Arabs. Why is that?

Let met explain the arguments of those Arabs who have been led to think along the lines of conspiracy, as I have come to know them through extensive discussions. It is a well-known fact that President Clinton is Israel's most loyal friend and its greatest admirer. American and Israeli Jews agree on this. Moreover, very few people would question that thanks to the Oslo agreement, the peace process was progressing well, up until the moment when Rabin, the first Israeli prime minister to have a vision of Palestinians and Israelis living separately but cooperatively, was assassinated by a Jewish fundamentalist. Shortly afterwards, four suicide bombings by fundamentalist Palestinians took a heavy toll of Israeli lives. These two negatives were bound to produce an equally negative result, which duly arrived in the shape of Binyamin Netanyahu, with his fundamentalist vision of a greater Israel. While declaring his conversion to the Oslo agreement, the new Israeli prime minister has done "his worst" to subvert it.

How did America respond? First, the Clinton administration tried "to adapt itself to the new situation", while gradually trying to involve Netanyahu more and more in the realities of the situation. But Netanyahu, relying on the automatic support of the American Congress, managed instead to bring the whole peace process to a complete halt. In its place, a process of attrition began, not only between Netanyahu and Arafat, but also between Netanyahu and Clinton, who felt that the Israeli prime minister was lying and cheating him, too. At the same time Netanyahu, who suspected that Clinton had worked against him during the Israeli elections, felt increasingly that he could never enjoy the same close relationship with the American President that his predecessor had. In addition, the way he was received by Congress on his first visit to the US, despite his background, encouraged him to feel that he could do without Clinton. And why not? Congress itself was "in his pocket", as the Israel correspondent of American National Public Radio put it a few weeks ago.

Towards the end of 1997, Netanyahu appeared to be winning the process of attrition, not only against the Palestinians, but also against Clinton. He seemed to have succeeded in changing the basic terms of reference of the peace process, by attempting to replace "land for peace" with "peace for peace" in the case of Syria, and "peace for security" in the case of the Palestinians. Still worse, he has managed to get away with equating "personal security" with "national security". And even when his own top security officials together with their Palestinian counterparts and the US Central Intelligence Agency formulated a Security Memorandum which provided almost iron-clad guarantees for the Israelis' personal security, he refused to endorse it. Arafat's contention that Netanyahu was using security to sabotage the whole peace process was by now evident to the American president.

Clinton's frustration with Netanyahu mounted once again with the renewed conflict between the US and Iraq. He became convinced that the Israeli prime minister's violations of Security Council resolutions and international agreements have made it difficult for him to mobilise Arab support for US military action against Saddam.

This, and a growing disillusionment among the rank and file of American Jews with Netanyahu's policies, encouraged Clinton to pick up sufficient courage to push the US role in the peace process forward from that of an "honest broker" into that of an active participant, offering ideas and proposals to try and bridge the widening gaps between the two sides. Furthermore, Clinton not only insisted that Israel must carry out "a credible and larger" second redeployment than that which Netanyahu was offering, but that it should also implement its commitment to a third redeployment before entering the final status talks.

At this point, the process of attrition between the two leaders suddenly erupted into the open, with Netanyahu swearing in public that he would never submit to American pressure, and Clinton refusing to receive him when he visited the US last December to address a meeting of a Jewish organisation in Los Angeles. In fact, Clinton had arrived at Los Angeles airport at the same time as Netanyahu's aircraft landed, but he deliberately ignored him. Then when he called Netanyahu and Arafat together for the most crucial talks yet last month, the usual lunch and joint press conference were both scrapped from the schedule.

For his part, Netanyahu travelled to Washington defiantly, knowing he had nothing to offer in terms of redeployment. According to *The New York Times*, he instructed his office before his departure to contact Jerry Falwell, a leading American Christian fundamentalist, who hates Clinton and his policies, and have him arrange a meeting which *he would address before he met* with Clinton. Falwell, who was visiting the Philippines at the time, and who has published a book accusing Clinton of drug trafficking, among other still more slanderous accusations, flew back to Washington where he arranged the most outrageous rally ever for a visiting dignitary on the eve of Netanyahu's meeting with the American president. Ehud Sprinzak, Israel's leading expert on the Israeli Right, told me this was "even more provocative than if Clinton had asked for a meeting in Gaza with the Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin on his way to meet Netanyahu in Israel."

It was against this confrontational background that the Netanyahu-Clinton talks opened — and the scandal over Monica Lewinsky began, accompanied by "the too hasty calls from some quarters" for his impeachment.

But for Arab believers in the conspiracy theory, this was not the end of the story. Soon there was more grist for their mill. Monica turned out to be Jewish. She was a child of privileged Beverly Hills, a fact which enabled her to be placed — or in the conspiratorial lingo — "to be planted" in the White House as "a sex bomb" close to a president known for his skill as a detonator. It turned out, too, that the person who triggered the bomb was Lucianne Goldberg, a Jewish publishing agent, author of *Madame Cleo's Girls*, a novel about three high-class prostitutes, and who had worked as a spy for Nixon inside George Macgovern's camp during the pre-election campaign in 1972. She admits that she had been in pursuit of Clinton with a vengeance. Not only was she hunting for stories from women with alleged previous sexual relations with Clinton, but also for stories to support the work of a major network of conspiracy theorists who believe that the death of Vincent Foster, a senior aide to Clinton and a former partner of *Hillary*, was a homicide, not a suicide. It was Goldberg who advised Linda Tripp first to tape Lewinsky when she confided in her about her sexual adventures in the Oval Office, and then to turn the tapes over to Kenneth Starr, the special prosecutor, who has widened his original investigation to include spying on the most intimate details of Clinton's life in *an attempt to incriminate him after* his successive failures to pin anything on him in relation to Whitewater, Travelgate and Foster's homicide. Even *Time* magazine said, "You don't have to be a conspiracy buff to have trouble with how the Whitewater investigation ended up focusing on the President's pants."

Starr, the son of a Church of Christ minister, is religiously and politically conservative. He owes his appointment to his present position, at least in part, to the ultra-conservative Senator Jesse Helms, chairman of the Senate's *International Relations Committee*. He was in hot pursuit of the president even before assuming his present job. He had considered offering legal help to Paula Jones in her case of sexual harassment against Clinton, a fact which prompted *The New York Times* to call for his resignation as soon as he was appointed.

It was the Jones case which led in turn to Monicagate. Lewinsky was questioned about her relations with Clinton and said under oath, contrary to her taped conversations with Tripp, that they were not of a sexual nature. Later, Starr almost resigned, not out of any scrupulousness on his part, but because he was tempted to accept the post of dean of a university financed by the conservative billionaire Mellon Scaife, who is a well-known Clinton baiter.

The alliance between Netanyahu and the ultra-conservatives was formally baptised by the Christian Fundamentalist rally on the eve of his meeting with Clinton. This, together with the link between Starr, "the right wing avenger", and Clinton's enemies, and the centrality of Jewish figures in the unfolding drama, has provided the Arab conspiracy buffs with more than enough material to nourish their imaginations. And when you point out to them, in an attempt to debunk their allegations, that more than 70 per cent of American Jews are opposed to Netanyahu's policies, they answer by pointing to the widening gulf between the majority of American Jews and their leaders, who have thrown their weight behind Netanyahu.

Furthermore, they say that even if Netanyahu's supporters were not somehow involved in Monicagate in the attempt "to restrain Clinton's recently-acquired leanings towards a degree of fairness in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict", they must have informed the Israeli prime minister, before he arrived in the States, of what Kenneth Starr was already investigating on the basis of the Linda Tripp tapes. And when you argue that instead *of restraining Clinton, the new* scandal may have him thrown out of the White House, and Israel may thus lose her most ardent supporter, they are not short of answers. "In the worst case scenario," they argue back, "he would be replaced by Vice-President Al Gore, an even more solid supporter of Israel." They even get carried away, claiming, "All these calculations have enabled Netanyahu to return to Israel as the victor in the war of attrition against Clinton and the Palestinians." And they add, significantly, "Look, don't you read anything into the fact that it was Ginsburg, Lewinsky's attorney, yet another Jew, who first referred without being solicited to the suspicion of a Zionist conspiracy, though he did so meaning to refute it?"

Globalising Egypt, fast

Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali, in a statement delivered before the People's Assembly this week, emphasised that the government's current economic policies are not only aimed at raising the annual growth rate to eight per cent, but also integrating Egypt into the global economy at a faster pace. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali disclosed in parliament this week that the government is moving at a faster pace to integrate the Egyptian economy into the global market. Addressing the People's Assembly Economic Affairs Committee last Sunday, Ghali argued that "integrating into the global market is an inevitable necessity at the present time. This means that a lot of economic sectors [insurance, banks and the capital market] should soon re-orient themselves to this new development in the international economic arena."

Ghali added, "We will achieve this through applying GATT [General Agreement for Trade and Tariffs] agreements in due time and liberalising the service sectors in banking, capital market, insurance and investment at the end of this year." In addition, he added, the Economy Ministry will coordinate with other ministries in order to reach a partnership agreement with the European Union as soon as possible this year. "Within the same context, the Economy Ministry will make greater efforts this year to establish an Arab free-trade zone and a common market."

Ghali explained that the current economic policies are also aimed at raising the annual growth rate to eight per cent, but not at the expense of the monetary and fiscal successes achieved in the last few years. Raising the annual growth rate to eight per cent, according to Ghali, will primarily require taking bolder steps to attract direct foreign investments into Egypt.

Ghali said that the Economy Ministry had recently embarked upon a new international campaign aimed at promoting Egypt for direct and securities investors. "We will conduct intensive contacts with major international capital markets and will set the priorities of sectors deemed appealing to multinational corporations," he said. The aim is to raise investment rates from the present 18 per cent of GDP to 28 per cent in the next three years.

Ghali also said that the government had recently embarked upon a programme of opening up a number of national service sectors to foreign private competition. "In this context, I would like to state that the government will soon submit a draft law aimed at allowing foreigners to own more than 49 per cent of shares of the existing insurance companies and even to establish new ones," said Ghali. He also disclosed that the Economy Ministry will even seek the help of foreign insurance experts in preparing the proposed law. Moreover, he added, a long-delayed Unified Companies Law will be submitted by the government to the People's Assembly next March to provide greater facilities for company establishment. "By the second half of this year, the government will also announce a decision to privatise the first of four major *public sector banks. This will require* a legislative amendment to ensure the independence of the Central Bank in drawing up *and monitoring* monetary policies," said Ghali.

Ghali said the objective of an annual eight per cent growth rate will require raising national saving rates from their current level of 19 per cent of GDP to 27 per cent of GDP by the turn of this century. "Banking policies will be adjusted in an attempt to attract the largest possible portion of national and foreign savings. Larger banking loans will also be provided to small-scale enterprises to enable the sector to create more than 90 per cent of employment opportunities. The end of this year, for example, will witness a LE1 billion increase in bank loans provided to small enterprises," said Ghali. At the same time, he added, liberalising the insurance sector is expected to raise long-term insurance from less than a half per cent of GDP at present to at least five per cent of GDP in the year 2000. "In other developing countries, long-term insurance accounts for 38 per cent of GDP," said Ghali.

All in all, Ghali explained that the Capital Market Authority, the Central Bank, the Companies Authority and the Insurance Control Authority will be in possession of as much as LE300 billion. "New *liberal policies will help a lot* in making optimal use of these huge financial resources in establishing new investment projects," Ghali said.

MENA's incidental victims

Hundreds of Egyptian labourers are returning jobless from Qatar — victims of the recent Egyptian-Qatari political rift. Mona El-Fiqi reports

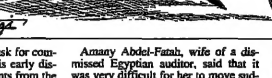
More than 700 Egyptian labourers have returned home in the past month after having been dismissed by their Qatari employers — the latest round of mass Qatari firings in the ongoing Egypt-Qatar political staredown.

According to the records of the Ministry of Labour and Immigration, nearly all Egyptian employees in the Qatari ministries of interior, defence, telecommunications and the State Bureau (equivalent to the Egyptian Central Auditing Agency) were dismissed and told that Qatar no longer needed their services.

Returnees say the Qatari government sacked Egyptians working in these ministries regardless of whether their contracts had expired or not.

The mass firings are part of an ongoing Egypt-Qatar political chill that started with Egypt's boycott of the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) ec*onomic conference in Doha in* November — due to the stagnation of the Middle East peace process. President Hosni Mubarak and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa II acted to patch up differences between the two countries in a meeting in Riyadh in November, but the dismissals have con*tinued*.

A total of 17,000 Egyptians are currently working in Qatar, according to the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration.



Hussein Ashour, an Egyptian auditor who was among the first group of workers expelled from Qatar, said that on 29 November 1997, all Egyptian employees in the State Bureau were told to leave the country by 29 December. Ashour signed a job contract in March 1997 which is valid until March 1999.

Ashour was one of many Egyptians who went to the Ministry of Manpower and *Immigration* to ask for compensation from Qatar for his early dismissal. He brought documents from the Qatari authorities showing his excellent work record and the absence of any reason for his dismissal.

The Qatari decision caused great hardship to Egyptian families. Many had to *sell their houses, cars and furniture at* half price because they were pressured to leave quickly.

Amany Abdel-Fatah, wife of a dismissed Egyptian auditor, said that it was very difficult for her to move suddenly with her children who were in school in Qatar.

"I had to sell two cars, the house and its furniture at very low prices because I had only a month," she said.

Qatari officials permitted no exceptions, Abdel-Fatah said. She asked the authorities for permission to stay one more week past the 29 December deadline in order to give her daughter a chance to attend the school mid-term exam, but they refused.

The main problem now facing Abdel-Fatah after her family's return is that the Egyptian schools refuse to accept her daughter because she is a month younger than her colleagues in Egypt. "I paid LE4,500 in school fees for the girl in Qatar and she did not attend even the mid-term exam. *Until now she has not* been accepted in any of the Egyptian schools, and she will miss the school year." With tears in her eyes, she added, "Why should we pay the price of the political misunderstanding!"

The job contract of her husband Abdel-Hamid Mustafa was valid till Oc*tober 1998, so he went to the Manpow*er Ministry seeking LE45,000 compensation for his salary for the coming 10 months.

The Ministry has begun meeting with returned employees in order to determine suitable compensation for them. It plans to make a formal compensation request to Qatar through the International Labour Organisation and the Arab Labour Organisation.

The Qatari government announced that its reason for dismissing Egyptians was to provide jobs for Qatari citizens. But Abdel-Qader El-Assar, a counsellor for international cooperation at the Ministry of Manpower and Immigration, pointed out that the government *did not replace the Egyptians with* Qataris, but rather with Palestinians and Jordanians.

"Laying off Egyptian labourers in Qatar is considered a violation of the labour agreement signed between Egypt and Qatar in 1975," El-Assar said.

The Federation of Trade Unions presented a memorandum to both the *ILO* and the ALO asking the Qatari government to compensate Egyptian labourers dismissed before the end of their contracts.

Mohamed Mursi, secretary-general at the Federation of Trade Unions, said the federation memo complains that *dismissing Egyptian workers with valid* contracts is considered a violation of the international labour law.

EgyptAir under industry fire

Tourism companies are up in arms against the national carrier EgyptAir for what they claim is a breach of the government's decision to discount air fares. Shereen Nasr investigates

More than 50 tourism companies have filed complaints to the Egyptian Travel Agents Association against the national air carrier EgyptAir for going back on a decision to sell tickets for domestic flights at a 50 per cent discount.

The companies charge that the airline's decision hit their business during the two-week holiday linking *Eid El-Fitr* with the mid-term school vacation.

The decision to discount airline tickets was made by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri in an attempt to revitalise the tourism industry following the Luxor massacre of 17 November. Companies argue that EgyptAir's misinterpretation of the decision embarrassed them in front of their clients and created a state of chaos in flying schedules.

"We started to sell packages at a special rate based on the discount. To our amazement, the discount did not materialise. As a result our business deteriorated rapidly just when it was about to pick up again," said Ghada Abdel-Latif from Memnon Tours.

When the company increased the price for the package, cancellations flooded in by the hundreds. "The whole idea was to encourage domestic travel by reducing air fares. EgyptAir has dealt the whole industry a damaging blow," Abdel-Latif said.

For its part, however, EgyptAir denies that it has withdrawn the discount. Khaled Gad, from the Technical Office of the company's Commercial Sector, provides a different interpretation of the facts. "It is not true to say that EgyptAir is selling tickets for domestic flights at two different prices. The discount is available, but only on scheduled flights," he said.

There are additional fees when supplementary flights have to be laid on. This means that the LE134 Cairo-Luxor price for a scheduled flight, for example, has to rise to LE194 for a flight not in the original schedule, Gad argued.

But for tour operators, the concept of "supplementary" flights during a national holiday seemed, in the words of Mohamed Lehita from Emeco Travel, "very tricky", considering that there is only one scheduled flight daily from Cairo to each of Luxor, Aswan, Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada.

"We are talking about moving at least 36,000 Egyptian passengers," Lehita said. "This means that except for a very small minority, all of them will have to go on supplementary flights, and thus pay the extra fees."

Fair comment, you might say. But the picture looks rather different from where EgyptAir stands.

"EgyptAir could not provide places for all these people on scheduled flights, and that is why we are making more supplementary flights," said Gad. He added that the company is already making losses on the reduced-rate scheduled flights. "So how can we be expected to sell tickets on the additional flights at the same rate?" he inquired.

However, the idea that EgyptAir is making losses was described as "far-fetched" by George Gabriel, Head of the Aviation Committee at the Egyptian Travel Agents Association. "Flying at a reduced rate is much better than remaining in a state of complete stagnation," he said.

Gabriel explained that EgyptAir's planes would not have moved at all during the two-week holiday, had it not been for the temporary boom in domestic travel. "As the only national carrier in Egypt, EgyptAir should have done its duty to encourage domestic travel. Unfortunately, it fell short of its task," he said.

In an attempt to cope with the situation, many tourist companies tried to do without EgyptAir altogether. "We were expecting this to happen," said Ashraf Sediq from Amenophis Tours. "In order to get out of an awkward situation, we shifted to buses and sold our packages at the same reduced rate."

Yet others fear the situation could damage their reputation. "When we offered the discounted packages, then had to increase the rates, many of our clients did not believe that the problem was created by EgyptAir. They thought we were making an unjustifiable demand for extra money," said Magdi Arafa from Hadeer Tours.

And at a time when the foreign tourist business is already suffering, what is even worse is the reaction of the tour operators abroad. "They, too, have discovered that they cannot fly their clients at the declared rates. We are losing our credibility," said George Gabriel.

Davos fails to agree on MENA

The destiny of the Middle East-North Africa economic cooperation conferences was left undecided by its organiser, the World Economic Forum

Politics overshadowed business as the representatives of the Middle East met in the Swiss resort of Davos for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF is the organiser of MENA, but this year the dramatic setback in the Arab-Israeli peace process was too conspicuous for agreement to be reached on the time and venue of the fifth MENA conference.

The if-when-and-where of MENA V is still an open question, that may with luck be answered by the WEF along with the governments and business sectors of the Middle East when they meet next April. But even that is not certain.

"It is very difficult to say for sure that a decision will be reached next April; it all depends on what is going to happen with the peace process," said one Egyptian official source who asked for his name to be withheld. He added, "As it is, the situation is very bleak and it is hard to see an agreement being reached in April if things keep going this way."

Indeed, according to Shafiq Gabr, a leading businessman and a member of the WEF board, "Businessmen cannot invest [their money] to launch projects in an area where the political situation has so seriously deteriorated."

The deterioration in the peace process has *posed a grave threat to regional economic* cooperation since 1996 when Binyamin Netanyahu's Likud-led coalition assumed power in Israel and started to backtrack on Arab-Israeli peace making. In 1996 Egypt almost declined to host the conference and only after a number of consultations agreed to have it in an effort to boost the spirit of regional coop*eration. But this tactic did not* work and Netanyahu's anti-political settlement attitude had soon gone so far that many Arab countries felt obliged to boycott, or at best send very low-key delegations to the fourth MENA conference in the Qatari capital last November.

Now the Arab-Israeli peace process seems to have reached a serious impasse on all three tracks — Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese. Meanwhile, Israel's relations with most other Arab countries is bad-to-tense. Iran has always been out of the game. So that leaves only Turkey, which is having hard political times with several Arab neighbours due to the Ankara-Tel Aviv military alliance which is widely seen as a threat to Arab influence in the peace-making equation.

That is why in Davos talk about regional economic cooperation suddenly collided with hard-hitting political facts.

Even Shimon Peres, the Godfather of the political scheme to integrate once and for all the Israeli economy with the wider Arab-Middle Eastern economy, failed to find an attentive audience for his talk about "investing in peace so as to persuade the Israeli economy to succumb to peace-making".

This is not to say that the idea has been dropped altogether, "although this possibility is not entirely remote", according to one official source.

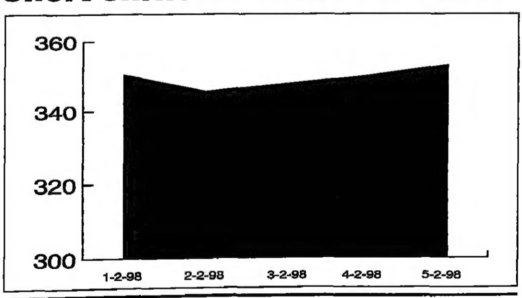
Technically, Tunis should be the next host of the conference. To date, the Tunisian government has not talked about the matter in public, but it has not said it is not going to have the conference.

The only Egyptian official in Davos was Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. Participating in a seminar about the economic future of the region, Moussa stressed that this future is not entirely dependent on *more comprehensive* regional cooperation. It also depends, he explained, on national economic reform programmes and sub-regional cooperation, as for example within an Arab-Arab framework. It should also include forms of inter-regional cooperation with the Mediterranean countries. But, said Moussa, for regional cooperation there has to be peace, or otherwise you will have many meetings and precious few projects.

***Gamil Ibrahim** in Davos and **Dina Ezzat** in Cairo*

Market report

Short shrift for those who short



FOR the second week in a row capital market performance showed some slight improvement. The General Market Index rose by 0.42 points to close at 353.01 for the week ending 5 February.

On the trading floor, the Commercial International Bank (CIB) captured the limelight, volume reaching 934,913 shares, with a value of over LE57.03 million — 15.57 per cent of the total shares traded for the week. In the process, CIB's share price rose by LE0.81.

The biggest price hike, however, came from Islamic International for Real Estate Investment, which surged from *LE14.35 to LE17.43. 1,027 shares* were traded, for a total value of LE17,095.

In all, 44 companies saw their share price rise, 73 saw it fall and 39 had to bide their time, as their quote remained unchanged.

In the meantime, on Monday, Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid announced a number of *new procedures* that *will* come into force immediately in an attempt to prevent speculators from artificially depressing the price of shares in recently privatised companies. Among these procedures, Ebeid announced that *an investment fund will be established* within every holding company, whose mission it will be to buy up the shares of affiliated companies whenever necessary in order to maintain their share price.

Ebeid also announced the creation of a follow-up unit to monitor the performance of privatised companies and the value of their shares, *so as to ensure* that share prices reflect real economic performance.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

220 Egypt's first constitution in modern times, promulgated in 1923, did not come overnight but was the culmination of many years of struggle and agitation against both the British occupation and the khedive. Demands for a constitution were voiced in the first decade of the 20th century. Secondary school students out on the platform of the Tanta railway station to greet Khedive Abbas II chanted slogans demanding a constitution. The chants rattled the khedive and the government, and the repercussions were described by some as "doomsday in Tanta." In this instalment of his *Diwan* series, **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** recounts the incident and its sequel

"An aggrieved Tantawi" was the signature to a letter that appeared on *Al-Ahram*'s front-page on 29 November 1910. The accompanying letter contained a lengthy commentary on the "incident at Tanta Secondary School." The author began, "People outside of Tanta imagine that the Day of Judgement has come in our city, an impression caused by the diverse reports and conflicting opinions concerning the incident involving the Tanta Secondary School, the discovery of a secret society and other such stories that cause anxiety and alarm."

The event to which the writer from Tanta was referring has not received a notable share of attention on the part of scholars of the history of the nationalist movement before World War I, nor in the memoirs of prominent personalities of the period such as palace confidant Ahmed Shafiq or even in official British documents such as the lengthy, highly detailed reports dispatched by the British High Commissioner in Cairo to his superiors in the Foreign Office. It is a curious lapse, considering that the incident in the capital of Al-Gharbiyya province occupied extensive space in the Egyptian press in November and December of that year.

That the nation's newspapers, including *Al-Ahram* of course, should have shown such an intense interest in events in a secondary school in a provincial capital is in large part due to previous developments involving the nationalist movement during that year. In February of that year, Prime Minister Butros Ghali was assassinated. Investigations revealed that the assassin, Ibrahim El-Wardani, was a member of an underground society with connections to the Nationalist Party. Authorities in Cairo promptly turned their attention to unearthing these societies. In a report written shortly after the assassination of the prime minister, Ronald Graham, the British adviser to the Ministry of Interior, wrote that the government had set up the Secret Service Bureau and that its agents had succeeded in infiltrating the underground societies in Egypt. The secret service, he said, had discovered 26 such societies.

With the exception of three — one Turkish, one Moroccan and one Italian — all the underground societies were Egyptian. All of these societies, without exception, had taken Cairo, and occasionally its suburbs, as their base. Although this indicated an alarming spread of underground activity in the capital, the information came as some relief to the authorities, as it increased their confidence that the influence of the nationalist movement had not penetrated the countryside.

For some time, British authorities had been fearful that nationalist agitation would spread to the provinces. Consequently, British consuls in the provincial capitals were instructed to keep in regular contact with the rural mayors, sheikhs and elders and to submit periodic reports on their political leanings. As late as 1908, however, the British High Commissioner was able to report that, based on the reports submitted to him by the provincial consuls, the political demonstrations in Cairo and Alexandria calling for a constitution reflected no more than the agitation of the educated urban elite. The incident in Tanta in 1910 would rock this complacency.

The first sign that an incident might be brewing could be found in a lengthy petition from 34 local Tanta officials and notables defending the director of Al-Gharbiyya against allegations of corruption in the national press, particularly in newspapers speaking for the Nationalist Party. One notes, firstly, that the signatories of the petition, the text of which appeared in *Al-Ahram* on 19 November 1910, all had vested interests in the directorate and, therefore, in upholding the reputation of its senior administrative official. One even suspects that the director, Mohamed Muhibb Pasha, actively prompted the signatories to write the petition, a practice that provincial officials continue to follow up to the present in order to project a good image of themselves to their superiors in Cairo.

Specifically, the petition was a response to complaints that had reached the capital concerning the running of the Tanta Secondary School which Muhibb Pasha had founded. Contrary to the aspersions in these complaints, the petitioners wrote, the secondary school was "an important moral deed that should be crowned with the wreath of glory and honour."

As irony would have it, an event that occurred less than a week later would shatter the image Muhibb Pasha had sought to establish for himself. On 24 November, the royal train carrying the Khedive Abbas II from his summer residence in Alexandria to Cairo was to make a five-minute stop in Tanta. As was the custom, local officials and dignitaries were in full turnout on the station platform and ranged behind them were several ranks of students from Tanta Secondary School. The provincial director had clearly intended to impress the khedive with their order and discipline. However, as *Al-Ahram*'s Tanta correspondent reported, "Within a few moments after His Royal Highness descended on to the platform, he addressed the director, inquiring after the welfare of the school and expressing his wishes for its progress and success. At that point, all present heard voices crying out, 'Long live the Khedive! Long live Egypt! Long live the constitution!'. When His Royal Highness asked the director of Al-Gharbiyya who was responsible for that chant, he was forced to respond that they were students from Tanta Secondary School. The khedive was visibly consternated by this uncalled for and highly tasteless behaviour on the part of the students from the secondary school which had only been opened a month previously. The director of Al-Gharbiyya became visibly ashen and so appalled were the khedive, the adviser to the Ministry of Finance and their excellencies the ministers, that they boarded the train which left the station a minute and a half ahead of schedule."

The students' cheers for the khedive and Egypt, of course, were heartily welcome. Their calls for a constitution was another matter. The previous three years had seen a radical reversal in the khedive's stance toward a constitution. The turning point in his attitude occurred with the departure of the former British high commissioner, Lord Cromer, and his replacement by Sir Eldon Gorst, a change that brought with it a warming of relations between Abdin Palace and Dubara Palace, the headquarters of the British High Commissioner. Whereas with Cromer Abbas sided with the constitutionalist cause to exert pressure on the high commissioner, under the subsequent "entente" between Abbas and Gorst, the nationalist appeals for a constitution were directed against Abbas who had come to enjoy a degree of power greater than any of his predecessors had under the British occupation. Thus, while relations between the two highest symbols of authority in the country could not have been better, relations between the khedive and the leaders of the nationalist movement had deteriorated greatly.

It might have been possible to attribute events at Tanta station to an isolated, spontaneous outburst of student nationalist ardour, were it not for the fact that another group of students from the same school had gone ahead to the train station at Kafr El-Zayat and repeated the performance. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent commented, "It is rumoured that the student demonstrations at the Tanta and Kafr El-Zayat train stations had been devised several days ago. It is not our intention to confirm or deny this rumour. Rather, it distresses us greatly that students should act in this manner. Indeed, students should not be required to attend such official ceremonies as their attention to academic matters should take higher priority."

To compound matters, once they had recovered from their shock at events in the Tanta station, the provincial director and officials returned immediately to the school where, as *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent reports, "They expressed their abhorrence of the students' behaviour and expelled them from the school." He continues that when the students left the school, "they assembled in the street to await the arrival of the director and when he passed they called out, 'Down with the Director!' As that kind of demonstration is highly tendentious, the police were brought in to arrest the students."

On 26 November, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent wired the head office in Cairo that the investigation revealed the existence of an underground society comprising 12 students from the secondary school. The society was headed by Mustafa El-Shorbagi, a member of the Nationalist Party who was acting as their lawyer in this case, and Mohamed Nabih Salam, another Nationalist Party lawyer. The society, wrote the correspondent, "is working to undermine the rules of government and has sought to corrupt the minds and hearts of the secondary school students, to bring them under its control and to use them to accomplish its aims." It further came to light that the society had also prompted the students' action against Muhibb Pasha as part of the society's campaign against the director for having appointed British engineers and employees in the Tanta municipal council. More significantly, the correspondent expressed the shock of provincial officials as well as of both British and Egyptian officials in the capital "to discover this underground society for until now Tanta had been aloof from all those disturbances."

Following the initial investigations, the public prosecutor filed a charge of slander against nine of the students and a charge of incitement to slander against the lawyers, El-Shorbagi and Salam. The nine students were kept in detention pending further investigations for an additional 14 days while the other students were released on bail of LE6 each.

The transfer of the prisoners to and from the jailhouse in shackles was considered highly provocative. Parents telegraphed *Al-Ahram* and other newspapers to protest this harsh treatment. Simultaneously, lawyers in Tanta wired *Al-Ahram* to protest police treatment of their colleagues and the "violation of the sanctity of their offices."

While Muhibb Pasha sought to save face by exaggerating the students' involvement in a secret society, *Al-Ahram*, along with the newspapers of the Nationalist Party, took the opposite tack. They condemned the transfer of prisoners in shackles "as a form of premature punishment and defamation of character inflicted upon the students, who should be treated as innocent until proved guilty." They also objected to the sensationalism provoked "by what is really a minor incident, in fact no incident at all."

Evidently the prosecution was more inclined toward the latter opinion for on 2 December it released the nine students on bond and dropped the charges of incitement to slander against the lawyers. At the same time, it referred the students, including the former six who had been released on bond, to the court of misdemeanours on the charge of "contempt of the director of Al-Gharbiyya." On 11 January, the court of misdemeanours pronounced its verdict. As *Al-Ahram* reported, "The court did not find in any of the testimony convincing evidence to compel it to punish all the students for contempt of the Director of Al-Gharbiyya... The court therefore declares the students' offence a misdemeanour and sentences them to the payment of a fine in accordance with Article 265 of the Penal Code."

The fines, ranging from 100 to 500 piastres, yielded an aggregate LE17 which was promptly paid by the students' parents. The outcome of the trial vindicated the opinion that the national climate had caused this incident to be blown out of proportion and that, in the words of the "aggrieved Tantawi," the "Day of Judgement" had not come to Tanta.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Money & Business

Egypt in foodstuffs exhibition

EGYPT will participate in El Mantarea, one of the largest foodstuffs exhibition in the world, which will be held in Barcelona, Spain from 3-6 March 1997. El Mantarea is considered one of the most important exhibitions of its kind, and will be attended by businessmen and company managers from all corners of the globe to exchange ideas and conclude deals.

Last year's exhibition saw 2,613 companies participating from over 50 countries. Halima Khattab, marketing coordinator of the Egyptian pavilion said that the exhibition is a great opportunity to boost Egyptian exports and open new markets for foodstuffs.

Egyptian economic laws in English

MINISTRY of Economy decision 503/1997, concerning standards for Egyptian accounting and amendments to the financial indicies of shareholding companies, is among the latest legislation available in English by the Middle East Library for Economic Services (tel/fax 3351141/3606804).

The company specialises in publishing Egyptian economic laws translated into English for the benefit of international companies wishing to operate and do business with Egypt. Other laws and regulations and available from the Middle East Library include investment laws, company laws, regulations on taxes, banks, foreign currencies, tourism, the environment, and more.

ACITEX 98 featuring the largest gathering of specialised companies

THE CAIRO International Conference Centre is sparing no effort to ensure the success of the 6th Al-Ahram Computer and Information Technology Exhibition which includes the most outstanding sponsors and companies operating in the field of computer and data technology. The exhibition will take place from 18-21 February, and be held simultaneously with the 6th Artificial Intelligence Conference.

Sponsors of ACITEX 98 include: IBM, Computer Consultant Group (CCG), Hi-Tech, ProTrade, Banque Misr, Xerox, National Bank of Egypt and Knowlogy International.

Exhibiting companies include:

Advanced Technology Systems (ATS) Est., Al-Ahram Management and Computer Centre (AMAC), Al-Badr for Electronics and Computers, Al-Magd Trade and Services, Al-Motahida Software, Al-Mukhtar Import and Export for Commercial Agents (NEXAR), Al-Wady Computer Services, Apple Care, Apple Line, Arabian American Computers and Systems Development Company, Better Business, Business Express, Cairo Computer, CeBIT, Compudream, CompuHouse Computers, Compuscience, Computer and Engineering World, Computer Consulting and Supplies, Computer Scientific Company, Computrack, Computrend for Computers and Electronic Systems, Crystal Mind Computer Solutions, CSA Computers, Daltix Information Technology, Data Bank Computers, Deutsch-Arabische Handel Skammer (SYSTEMS), Diamond Computer and Trading, Dimension for Trading and Supplies, EgyComp, EgyGate, Egyptian Engineering Computer Company, EGYTECH, El-Arabi Co. for Trading and Manufacturing, El-Ghandour Est., El-Shorouk Trading, El-Tawil International Trade, ElectroServ, Estesharia for Electronics and Computers, FAX Computer Systems, Fouda Co. Ltd, Future Soft, Gamma Electronics, Glory Tech, Hadeya for Arabic Software, Heart Computer Services, Hi-Tec Zone, Horizon Development, Integral for Computers and Communications, Integrated Trading Centre, International Computer and Services, International Electronics Centre, Kady International Trading Company, KME CompuTools, Laser Misr, Legend System Misr, Manf Trading House, Mega Group, Micro Hard, Microsoft, Misr Computer Company, Moroge, Multi Media Egypt, NCC Golden Games Centre, NETLINE, Office Automation, Office Information Systems (OFIS), Omega Marketing Company, Optimum Media Egypt, Overseas Computers, Powerline, ProComp, ProLine Egypt, RAM, Sakhr Al-Ahram Computers, SANA Computers and Electronics, SATEE for Art and Design Computer Centre, Scientific Centre for Computers, Research and Development International (RDI), TAG Computer Centre, TC Comp, UBC for Trading and Engineering, Ultra Trade, United Engineers Computer Systems (UNI Comp), United for Computer and Office Equipment and Universe.

NBE provides exportation services

UNDOUBTEDLY, the magnification of the Egyptian exports volume imposes a significant challenge on the economic development in the coming period, especially in the light of the fierce international competition and the liberalisation of world trade on services and commodities.

Accordingly, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has been encouraging exports, by adopting the concept of universal banking so as to meet the prerequisites of the current stage. Through such a concept, NBE is able to extend new banking services via 343 banking units that offer the following services all over Egypt:

— Offering buyer's credit so as to help the Egyptian exporters gain customers abroad. The Bank also offers financing for Egyptian exporters amounting to 70-80 per cent of the transaction's total value. In addition, NBE promotes Egyptian products abroad through its worldwide network of 1,218 correspondents.

— Financing the establishment of joint free zones and granting relevant finance in order to encourage manufacturing and exportation.

— Financing the establishment of private industrial cities and industrial complexes in the new communities that enjoy a high comparative advantage in terms of foreign trade.

— Factoring and invoice discounting, as this provides finance and shoulders the credit risk of the exporters and also evaluates the importers' credit worthiness along with carrying out collection services.

— Hedging against the fluctuations of interest and exchange rates through the off-balance sheet activities such as options, futures, forward contracts and forward interest rate agreements, a matter that facilitates determining the prospective costs to be borne by either the investor or the exporter.

— Financing shipment projects, being a vital element to promote and enhance exports.

— Participating in the capital of institutions directly linked with export activities, especially export guarantee companies. This is in addition to participating in the Export Development Bank of Egypt and the African Export and Import Bank.

— Financing the establishment of Egyptian export warehouses at the main demand areas, so as to improve the efficiency of exportation in a way that helps seize relevant opportunities.

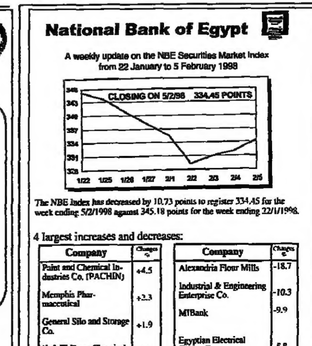
— Supporting complementary activities which are indispensable for exports, such as local and foreign fairs that contribute to promoting Egyptian products. For such a purpose, NBE has established Egypt Houses Abroad Company in order to provide Egyptian exporters with full information on foreign markets.

— Backing and stimulating intra-Arab trade in cooperation with the relevant programme that is managed by the Arab Monetary Fund. This is in addition to signing an agreement of import finance in cooperation with other Arab and Islamic financial institutions.

Moreover, the Bank is fast on its heels to establishing the Export Trustees Unit with a view to extending export-related services, expanding exporters' base, and gaining access to international markets. In fact, the said step crowns NBE's efforts to enhance Egyptian exports.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 22 January to 5 February 1998



The NBE Index has decreased by 10.73 points to register 334.45 for the week ending 5/2/1998 against 345.18 points for the week ending 22/1/1998.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %	Company	Changes %
Paint and Chemical Industries Co. (PACHIN)	+4.5	Alexandria Flour Mills	-18.7
Memphis Pharmaceutical	+2.3	Industrial & Engineering Enterprise Co.	-10.3
General Silo and Storage Co.	+1.9	MIBank	-9.9
Kafr El-Zayat Chemical Industries Co.	+1.7	Egyptian Electrical Cables Co.	-5.8

Al-Ahram Weekly

Off the hook?

The Middle East peace process will almost certainly be a major casualty of a US military strike against Iraq. In Paris this week, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa put it mildly when he said that an attack "would have a negative effect on the peace process".

Observers believe an American strike would be a godsend for Netanyahu; it would, in effect, get him off the hook. Since the Hebron redeployment agreement of January 1997, the peace process has been stagnant despite all Madeleine Albright's scurrying back and forth. There has been no light at the end of the tunnel. For all intents and purposes, the peace process has been in a state of suspended animation.

Now Washington, supposedly the honest broker in the process, is almost completely preoccupied with ways of punishing Iraq and bringing Saddam Hussein to heel. The peace process is on the back burner in the White House kitchen, much to Netanyahu's delight.

With President Clinton besieged by a sex scandal and trying to cover it up by playing the hero against Iraq, any notion of US pressure on Israel to relax its intransigent position in the peace talks is out of the question.

Clinton, battered by criticism and jeering at home, is not about to anger the Jewish lobby. Nor is Netanyahu — having flouted all peace deals with the Palestinians all the way from Madrid to Hebron — ready or willing to waste the golden opportunity afforded by the US confrontation with Iraq to halt further troop withdrawals from Palestinian territories and carry on with settlement building.

The Palestinians, for their part, can hardly be expected to make any further concessions at a time when the US is bearing down on an Arab country to crush its military potential and cause further misery to its people.

So the peace process will remain static for weeks, maybe months; a time bomb ticking away, ready to explode.

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A strike for what?

Can a US strike at Iraq accomplish its stated aims, let alone those that remain unstated? **Amin Hewedy** thinks not

A story is recounted that during the invasion of the region by the Mongol Hulagu's forces, a patrol unit was out wreaking havoc and atrocities in the streets of Baghdad, as soldiers pursued a group of citizens fleeing in search of safety. Overtaking a terror-stricken individual, they ordered the man to lie down beside a wall and wait for their return at the end of the chase. Strangely enough, the man, frightened out of his wits, complied with their instructions and stayed put until the assassins came back and murdered him too. He was unable to find any alternative other than to submit to their evil demand. This story provides a neat metaphor for the conditions faced by Arabs as they await an imminent US strike against Iraq.

As American officials announce constantly that the US has run out of patience and cannot delay military action any longer, the Arabs idly watch the selective implementation of international legality. Israel, for example, has repeatedly ignored countless international resolutions; it continues to reject any inspection of its nuclear sites, and yet America continues to supply Israel with all of its arsenal's advanced technology. And such weaponry serves to increase Israeli intransigence with regard to its use of force.

The decision to launch a strike against Iraq was probably taken some time ago. The delay, between decision and implementation, was merely the wait for a suitable excuse, one that might vest it with a semblance of international legality.

But what kind of strike are we waiting for? Certainly it is unlikely to be as comprehensive an operation as Desert Storm. Marine and air force combined action is likely to lie at the heart of the operation as Iraqi land forces are flushed from their defence positions and exposed to air attack. A northern offensive might be carried out, by proxy, in Kurdish territory, the aim being to demonstrate to the Iraqis Saddam's inability to control even his own territory.

Patrol units might be used to operate behind Iraqi lines to instigate terror and fear, to assist the air strikes and destroy communication lines. A heavy density of air-to-ground and sea-to-ground missiles is also likely to be used, such as would recall the first three hours of the Desert Storm operation on 17 January 1991, when 1300 airplanes dropped 18,000 tons of explosives on 60 Iraqi targets.

Will the targets of the attackers be confined to military objectives, or will civilian sites of strategic nature be included in order to cripple Iraqi capabilities? Some civilian establishments, such as the oil fields, presidential palaces and bridges, will almost certainly be attacked.

Madeleine Albright announced during her last visit to Cairo that "we aim to abort Saddam's capability to obtain or develop weapons of mass destruction, or to threaten his neighbours."

Despite such reassuring words, that cloak a whole range of other unspoken aims, one might ask, is such massive and brutal use of power by the US sufficient to realise regional stability, and to resolve the diplomatic or technical issues concerning the manner in which the inspection teams perform their duties?

In an earlier article I have suggested that the use of force to resolve conflicts is bad procedure. The command of the coalition forces, during the earlier conflict with Iraq, had defined their objectives as the destruction of the Iraqi war machine, the implementation of which involved a lengthy operation.

Yet after the command had declared its mission complete, more than 100 Iraqi airplanes flew to Iranian airports. So one inevitably thinks of a similar scenario — what if, after declaring the elimination of the chemical or biological heads, some of them still remain intact? What guarantee can we have that the strike will lead to its declared aims, given past experiences?

In such technological warfare the easiest part is the manufacturing process. Research and development are harder to accomplish, but they depend on know-how and presumably that know how will remain intact following any attack.

And is it, in any case, sensible to suppose that regional stability will be realised after Iraq has been wiped out? Of course not, given that Israel will continue to maintain the supremacy of its military machine, with conventional, super-conventional and nuclear weapons. It will continue to reject peace, and this will cause a state of regional imbalance between Israel, that possesses such weapons, and its neighbours, which are not allowed to.

There is no greater danger to the stability of any region than the existence of a strong entity in the midst of weaker neighbours. Stability cannot, after all, ever be accomplished before effecting a balance between the two aspects of power and interests.

While on the subject of Israel, let us try to surmise its role in this operation. Israel will not forget that a rocket was fired at it during the Desert Storm operation. Only the US was able to prevent it from retaliating, an action dictated by Washington's fear of provoking problems with the Arabs who had participated in the operation. But today the Arabs do not inspire fear or arouse concern in anyone at all. Not only that, but regional inter-Arab relations, though intertwined, continue to be attenuated. In my opinion, Israel will be undertaking operations on its own account, whether Iraq directs a blow against it or refrains from doing so. Israel will act not only to avenge the previous strike, but to ensure the destruction of targets that it considers a threat to its own strategic security.

Other problems will ensue once the strike begins. There will be an exodus of Iraqi emigrants fleeing to Jordan. Thousands of Kurds will escape to Europe. Moreover, concern for the peace process between Palestinians and Israel will abate, while support for Netanyahu's hard-line policy will increase.

The US should swallow its hatred of the Iraqi regime, and President Clinton should control his personal feelings against President Saddam, who, in turn, must manage to swallow his arrogance and recklessness in order to avoid falling over the precipice. Diplomatic action has certain bounds beyond which it cannot proceed. But politicians should know how to discriminate between a bad option and worse options, and to differentiate between a calculated risk and a foolish gamble. Suicide is not the best option for dealing with crises, and incomplete solutions are capable of preempting a crisis and preventing its transformation into active combat.

If President Saddam emerges from this critical situation with increased food-for-oil deals, this will be deemed a wise course which will provide some satisfaction and will avert the surrender which he does not accept. If he allows the opportunity for a solution to be brought about through the Arabs' good offices, that will serve as ample cover for the required retreat. Later, after a suitable cooling off period, the oppressive international resolutions which have caused far more crises than stability, might be reviewed. Punitive sanctions, after all, cannot possibly be imposed forever, nor the embargo be indefinitely maintained.

The writer is a former minister of defence and chief of General Intelligence.

Is war inevitable?

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that a peaceful settlement of the Iraqi crisis is, at this juncture, the key factor in preventing the Middle East from sinking into chaos

It is not clear whether the dogs of war will be unleashed on Iraq for the violations committed by Saddam Hussein or because of those committed by Bill Clinton. What is clear, however, is that the Clinton administration is excessively tolerant when it comes to Netanyahu's violations and totally uncompromising towards those of Saddam. This casts doubts on the supposedly unbiased stance of the United States in its role as sponsor of peace and stability in the Middle East, and raises the question of whether it is qualified to continue monopolising this highly critical role.

Actually, the time has come to invite other international parties, like Europe, Russia and China, to play a more active role in promoting the cause of peace in the Middle East. On the question of a unified European stand, it is worth noting that Tony Blair's high-profile support for Bill Clinton last week seems to be governed by considerations which raise questions as to Britain's commitment to the European Union. Both Tony Blair and Bill Clinton reached the pinnacle of power in their respective countries from a position of left of centre in society, moving thereafter closer to the centre, towards the middle class which is acquiring ever greater importance in the developed societies of the post-bipolar world order.

Because the Middle East is of such vital geopolitical importance, no international party can afford to remain on the sidelines while its fate is being determined. Today Russia has become the most visible mediator with Saddam. Its parliament, the Duma, has threatened to vote against the continued imposition of sanctions against Iraq if the Americans go forward with a military strike, while Yeltsin has been quoted as warning that the military option could trigger off a third world war. But while Russia may be the party most interested in asserting its presence on the Middle East stage at this juncture, Europe, particularly France, which cannot stand idly by and watch a region in its immediate vicinity go up in flames, can be the most effective.

However, Europe's effectiveness could be handicapped by the fact that its perceptions over the critical issues in the Middle East are occasionally at odds with those of the regional protagonists. A case in point is the recent trial in France of Roger Garaudy, whose book, *The Founding Myths of Israeli Policy*, is accused of using anti-Zionism as a cover for what is actually anti-Semitism. The questions his book raises in connection with the Holocaust are seen by his detractors in France as denying that Jews were targeted for no other reason than that they were Jews, and, hence, as absolving the Nazis of the crime of racism. In the Arab/Islamic world, on the contrary, Garaudy is seen as a hero, a David defying the Zionist Goliath in the heart of the Western world, an issue of particular resonance at a time the banner of Zionism is being raised by extremists like Netanyahu to justify persecuting the Palestinians and, indeed, undermining the entire peace process.

Actually, the logic of characterising Garaudy as an anti-Semite disguised as an anti-Zionist can, if carried to its ultimate conclusion, imply that he enjoys wide admiration and support in the Arab/Islamic world because he renounced the values of the Judeo-Christian West through his conversion to Islam. His popularity in Arab eyes could thus be perceived as betraying, intentionally or not, a mutation in the Arab-Israeli conflict, from being a confrontation between pan-Arabism and Zionism into becoming one between Islam and Judaism. To mitigate the negative implications of this new religious polarisation, there have been attempts to couch it in more sophisticated terms. One prominent example is Samuel P. Huntington's famous clash of civilisations theory, the word civilisation serving as a euphemism for race or religion.

This is more reason to involve Europe more closely in the search for regional peace and stability. The United States, can, if it wishes, and, more important, if it is ready to defy its powerful Zionist lobby, bring pressure to bear on Israel in order to reach a settlement. But Europe, where the Jewish problem arose in the first place, has a different role to play.

Europe has been the stage of the persecution of Jews by Christians over centuries, reaching a paroxysm with the Holocaust in the mid-20th century. But Europe's endorsement of the Zionist solution to the Jewish problem has shifted the focus of persecution from the Jews to the Palestinians. It is only if the same priority accorded to the question of redressing the wrong done to the Jews is given to that of redressing the wrong inflicted on the Palestinians that the Arab peoples could come to accept a negotiated settlement of the entire conflict and establish peace on solid grounds. Europe is required to assume this responsibility, not only for moral or ethical reasons, but for its own essential interests. The world is still bipolar, though it is along a North-South, and no longer an East-West, axis. It is also said to be governed by an emerging globalism. But globalism cannot go hand in hand with a North-South divide. There is every reason to believe that the privileged North will protect itself against what it can perceive as continued onslaughts from the dispossessed South by replacing the physical barriers between North and South, which are being lifted in the name of globalism, by spiritual barriers drawn from the ideological arsenal of racism.

And here France, presently the arena of the debate over the Garaudy affair, could eventually develop a wider debate that would touch on the underlying problems that brought about the Garaudy affair in the first place. This year France is celebrating the bicentennial of its relations with Egypt, a key Middle East protagonist. Some members of the Egyptian intelligentsia resent the commemoration of what they perceive as an act of aggression against Egypt, namely, the Bonaparte expedition, which was launched exactly two centuries ago this year. For them, it evokes France's colonial project rather than the expedition's scientific and cultural achievements (the deciphering of the Rosetta Stone, which unlocked the door to the secrets of Ancient Egypt, the introduction of the first printing press into Egypt, etc). The best way of settling this debate is not by sinking into scholastic hair-splitting about the past, but by taking common action in the present and for the sake of the future, that is common action devoid of any neo-colonial connotations. Ideally, this would take the form of a joint Arab-European initiative, spearheaded by France and Egypt, against a military solution of the Iraqi crisis. An added bonus is that if their initiative succeeds, it is bound to have a beneficial effect in preparing for the peaceful solution of other critical crises in the Middle East, including the Arab-Israeli crisis.

Lessons in leadership

By Naguib Mahfouz

The media frenzy surrounding President Clinton's love affairs has revealed several interesting facts. First, while a person may enjoy all the freedoms in the world, he must constantly act in a way consistent with his position, in terms of responsibility and reputation. This applies to everyone, even — perhaps especially — heads of state. By virtue of his position, a president or prime minister, a king or a judge, is not entitled to all the freedoms a normal citizen enjoys.

Second, any violation of this rule may compromise the very policy of the state. Such a violation can limit the leader's ability to take bold, decisive and credible stances. A case in point is Netanyahu's latest visit to Washington, where an enfeebled Clinton was completely incapable of exerting any pressure whatsoever on the Israeli premier to push the peace process forward.

Through his personal conduct, the US president undermined US policies and damaged his own country's interests in the region.

Third, in this context, the many advantages of the American legal system have been revealed. While the system embodies the loftiest moral values, on the other hand, it ensures that all American citizens are treated equally before the law.

We have witnessed a president dismissed for having resorted to unethical means to dominate his rivals. President Clinton could meet the same fate. The details of this whole affair, however, are beside the point. The issue here is the lesson to be learned.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

The standard for the Arabs

Al-Mussawar: "Albright never understood that the Arabs were prepared to support whole-heartedly a strike against Iraq and back the arrest and prosecution of of its rulers — i.e. in the same way that Panama's Noriega was dealt with — had the US been prepared to deal with Israel in similar fashion. Israel has not only ignored UN resolutions, but it has also refused to implement agreements signed on the White House lawn in the presence of the US president. But Israel is America's darling and the Arabs are expected to prostrate themselves and thank the US for the presence of 'poor little Israel' which possesses only 300 nuclear warheads, arsenals of chemical weapons, the latest warplanes, the heaviest battle tanks and the longest range guns. All this and yet Albright is terrified of a threat to America's security from a starving Iraq, its sick children and an army which was decimated in the Gulf War."
(Mahmoud El-Saadany, 6 February)

Al-Ahali: "US preparations for a strike against Iraq are the issue of the hour. Clinton is trying to wash his dirty linen with the water of the Euphrates but that will not come about. Since the invasion of Kuwait, I have always said that I am with Kuwait's Sheikh Jaber against Saddam and with Saddam against Bush. And above all, I am with the Iraqi people against Saddam. Now history is repeating itself and I would like to say that all Arab lands are one: an attack against Iraq is an attack against Egypt and Palestine, which remains the core of the conflict in the region. All what we are seeing are attempts to divert attention away from the main issue which is Palestine."
(Abdel-Aal El-Baqury, 4 February)

Rose El-Youssef: "Israel is the only country to gain from a strike against Iraq. And a strike against Iraq will be a rehearsal for one against Iran. And the Gulf states will pay for this and will have to contend with the hatred of future generations of Iraqis. Such a strike will weaken the position of the Arab states and make them more vulnerable to a state of siege. To the powers that be, there is no difference between Egypt and Sudan, Kuwait and Iraq, or Morocco and the Emirates. We represent mere interests to be dealt with as the powers see fit. We should not imagine anything else."
(Adel Hamouda, 9 February)

Al-Arabi: "The question is not whether we should participate in the US aggression against Iraq but how to stop such an aggression one way or the other. It is not a question of appealing to the better nature of the US but whether the US will realise that its interests will suffer in case of such an aggression. We do not say this only for Iraq's sake but for the sake of all the Arabs as we are all under siege and face US bombs now or in the future."
(Galal Aref, 9 February)

Al-Shaab: "I think the situation requires the holding of an early Arab summit (partial or full) and I would ask the participants to agree on counter-measures against the US-Israeli alliance if the aggression against Iraq takes place. As for Iran, it is not enough for it to issue statements of condemnation. It should warn the US-Israeli alliance that Iraq will not be alone if it is forced to fight. Such a warning will not only bolster Islamic solidarity but will ensure the security of Iran, since destroying Iraq will prepare Iran for the same fate. If the Arabs and Iran act together, some sense may enter the head of the US president."
(Adel Hussein, 6 February)

October: "The head of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Jesse Helms, threatened, in a CNN interview, to cut off aid to Egypt if it refused to join a US strike against Iraq. Does he imagine that aid can change principles?
(Ragab El-Banna, 8 February)

Compiled by **Galal Nassar**



Chief UN arms inspector Richard Butler is a study in grey. The severe lines linking his beak-like nose to his thin-lipped moue provide contrast, but I also had in mind the lower jaw of a ventriloquist's dummy, which appears detached from the rest of the head. In many ways, Butler reminds me of a disgruntled baby eagle, not satisfied by the meagre fare brought back by its feeders, but unsure where to seek further nourishment. The tuft of hair perched atop his bulbous forehead highlights his small but piercing eyes as he looks here and there for deadly weapons.

Close up

Salama A. Salama

The Arab impasse

We should not let wishful thinking delude us into believing that a US military operation against Iraq can be averted within the context of an Arab-style settlement which responds to Iraq's demands. The simple truth is that the US will *not* accept a solution that saves Saddam's face, nor one that would enable France or Russia to take any form of credit, much less a solution that would give the Arabs the least opportunity to recover some of their dignity after seven long years of continuous concessions.

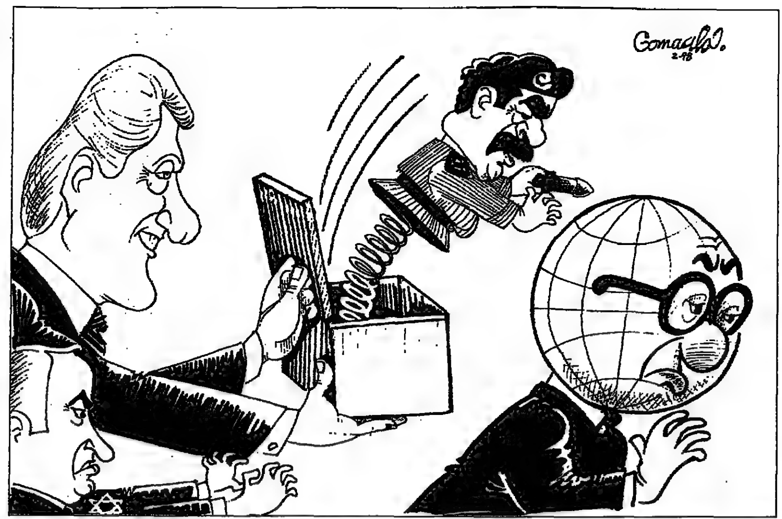
The US military operation to crush Iraq now seems unavoidable, unless Baghdad reneges completely on its position and allows the UN team access to all the required sites. Washington today is not deliberating whether to strike or not, or discussing the timing of the strike; the controversy that is raging between the administration and Congress is largely as to the extent of the military operation to be launched. The Clinton administration endorses the need to destroy the military infrastructure which buttresses the regime, and to eradicate any facilities for the production of chemical, biological or other weapons, by pounding the suspected sites countless times over until the goal is fulfilled.

The right-wing majority in the two houses of Congress, however, is determined to pursue operations even further by sending in ground forces to topple Saddam, regardless of the consequences.

The difference between these two options is hardly visible to the naked eye, given the massive size of forces which have been deployed in the region, unprecedented since the second Gulf War. Both are perfectly feasible. But the US administration may have wished to keep that part of its plan under wraps, so as not to arouse objections or fan the fears of its Arab "friends". Moreover, it is quite likely that the military action will not target Iraq alone, nor will it stop at the overthrow of an "outcast" regime. The strike against Baghdad may well be only a first step, to be followed by the implementation of a comprehensive American plan for the region. This plan would provide "solutions" to the problems of the Middle East, including the Palestinian problem, while hostile regimes in the region would simply be "washed away".

Hence it is logical that all the Arab states, with the exception of Kuwait and Bahrain (and possibly Jordan), having been informed of the disastrous fate awaiting Iraq if it persists in refusing to submit to the demands of UNSCOM inspectors, have declared their opposition to the use of their territory as launching bases for the US operation. If they did grant such use, and the operation passed off as anticipated, Arab governments would find themselves overwhelmed by the angry masses. We should not underestimate the significance of Albright's statement, which she has reiterated on every visit to the region, that she found "full understanding" in the Arab states she visited. Arab statements, which have fluctuated in tone between hot and half-cold, "pessimistic" and "pessoptimistic", should suffice to dispel all doubt that Arab "realism" will, in the end, prevail.

For seven long years, the Arabs have clearly been reluctant to solve the Iraqi problem or to contain the Iraqi regime themselves, thus leaving the US to formulate such policies alone. Blind to the way global and regional developments have been shaping their future, the Arabs gave the US a free hand. This is the error for which they must now pay. They must now accept the arbitrary solutions dictated by the US, which take no account of international legality or Security Council resolutions. Under the pretence of maintaining world peace and protecting states in the region from Iraqi weapons, the US can simply ignore the Arab will which is opposed to military action against Iraq, as the Arab leaders continue to point out. But the US has never cared about the Arab will. It probably never will.



Soapbox

Noah's son

According to the Qur'an, Noah tried to persuade his son to follow him on the Ark in order to flee the imminent flood. But Noah's son staunchly rejected his father's pleas, choosing instead to flee by scaling a mountain. Noah's son, of course, drowned with all those who, unlike Noah, had failed to see that destruction was upon the world.

Saddam Hussein may be today's answer to Noah's son. While the entire world can foresee the destruction at hand, Saddam alone categorically refuses to choose his country's salvation. His self-image is unrealistic and lacks the flexibility needed to resolve this artificial crisis.

The crisis is artificial because everyone knows that Saddam no longer possesses any weapons of mass destruction, has never had nuclear weapons, nor is there any chance that he will in the future. The primitive chemical weapons in the Iraqi arsenal were used against Iran and the Kurds, and the few that remain have lost their effectiveness due to long periods in storage. As for biological weapons, these can be manufactured in any biology teacher's laboratory, and the few missiles in Iraq mean that the biological weapons are no threat to Iraq's more distant neighbours.

Saddam and his inner circle of supporters spread the lie of the weapons of mass destruction, seeking to propagate the image of Iraq as an invincible military power. This image is little more than a myth, but Israel and the West continue to spread the falsehood.

An attack on any Arab state is in Israel's best interest; for Washington, the Gulf region holds resources which must be protected at any cost. Saddam is merely the hand of fate, through which all the interests in the region — except those of the Iraqi people — can be fulfilled.



This week's Soapbox speaker is the managing editor of the Al-Ahram daily.

Mohamed Abdel-Moneim

Hijacking the UN

Two crimes, one culprit. **Hassan Nafaa** hears the sound of silence

When the "second Gulf War" erupted after President Saddam Hussein's disastrous decision to invade Kuwait, the whole world was amazed to find a United Nations quite different from the organisation to which it had been accustomed. The UN as the world knew it was an ineffective, inactive international organisation, unable to take any initiative, inundated with debts to the point of near bankruptcy. The US, which regarded the UN with contempt, often stalled in paying its dues, or defaulted altogether. On the eve of the Gulf crisis, the US owed the UN around $1.7 billion.

A number of incidents underscoring the UN's weakness took place throughout the Cold War period. For almost half a century, from the organisation's inception until 1990, the Security Council never threatened to use military force against an aggressor, even one which committed repeated acts of military aggression. The only exception to this rule was the 1950 Korean crisis, which took place under unusual circumstances. Not once did the Security Council refer to chapter seven of the UN Charter, nor did it draw up a mechanism for collective security. And only in the case of former Rhodesia and South Africa did the Security Council impose limited economic sanctions. In both cases, many countries, particularly Western powers which regarded the vicious apartheid regime as an ally, failed to maintain the embargo.

No sooner had Iraq invaded Kuwait, however, than the Security Council suddenly reared up like a genie rising from a bottle. In under three months the Council passed 12 resolutions, all referring to chapter seven of the UN Charter. Riding on the strength of these resolutions, the Council subsequently imposed an unprecedented number of political and economic sanctions on Iraq, followed by a comprehensive military siege to ensure that the entire international community abide by the resolutions. Finally, the countries which had assisted in the liberation of Kuwait resorted to military force to compel Iraq to abide by Security Council resolutions.

Undoubtedly, several factors enabled the Security Council to play this unusual role: the nature of the crisis, its timing, the scale of the international and regional interests involved, divisions in the Arab world and the Arabs' failure to contain the crisis...

All these factors, and many others, however, fail to adequately account for what happened. Another, external condition was necessary. It provided the circumstances that enabled the possibility of military intervention to be made concrete and certain. This condition was the end of the Cold War and the beginning of a new phase characterised by a global redistribution of power. The "new world order" helped carry the UN to new heights during the early months of the second Gulf crisis.

Armed with this brave new slogan, countries keen to punish Iraq were able to justify their position, claiming that their target was not Iraq in particular, but any present or future aggressor. The "new world order" rested on the allegation that the Cold War was the only obstacle to collective security and was responsible for the Security Council's past paralysis. According to this perspective, the end of the Cold War naturally paved the way for an effective UN role as envisioned in the organisation's charter. The new world order, however, was only an illusion invented then covertly sold to the world by the US during the Gulf crisis. The new order was a principal link in the chain of American strategy, deployed to enable the US to handle the crisis single-handedly. That the UN should emerge victorious from the crisis was never a part of America's strategy. The real objective was that the US emerge as the world's sole superpower.

The bad faith inherent in this conscious policy was clear to independent observers even before the liberation of Kuwait. This was brought home on two main occasions. First, Israel ignored UN resolutions while the Gulf crisis was in progress, making it clear that the Security Council was applying double standards. Some were still prepared to believe that the US would exert every effort, as it had pledged, to realise a comprehensive, lasting and just settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and justified procrastination on this point, suggesting that a solution could only be found after Kuwait's liberation, to avoid giving Saddam Hussein credit for achieving a settlement.

US motives appeared even more dubious on the second occasion, when the US insisted that military force be used to contain the Gulf crisis and that countries cooperating with Kuwait give it the mandate to use force. The alternative of resorting to collective security mechanisms, in accordance with the UN Charter, was discarded. Yet once again, some people were still prepared to believe that American insistence on force was due only to practical and procedural factors.

In this context, those suspicious of American intentions had no alternative but to wait in the hope that time would tell. Two other incidents, however, made it clear that they were fooling only themselves.

It seemed that the US was genuinely trying to fulfil its commitments when it exerted immediate, insistent pressure on Israel to attend the Madrid conference. It soon became obvious, however, that the US had no intention of going further than that. Gradually the American position drew closer to that of Israel, and eventually it was no longer possible to tell the difference between the two. Furthermore, rather than putting pressure on Israel, the US began to turn the heat up on the Arabs, under the pretext that the concessions they had made were insufficient.

Nor did the US make any serious attempt to resort to collective security mechanisms, or to repair the damage sustained during the Cold War. On the contrary, the US sought absolute freedom to exercise its power unfettered by any constraints of international legitimacy. While it initially showed enthusiasm in Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, the US eventually ensured that the US contingent was independent of the UN force sent to keep the peace. The US then withdrew from Somalia without waiting for a Security Council resolution. Obviously, there were no American interests in Somalia worth fighting for.

Subsequent incidents revealed that bolstering the role of the UN in the new world order had no place in American policy: the US was not interested in extending former UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali's term in office, reforming and restructuring the UN, expanding the Security Council membership, or resolving the UN's financial crisis. While during the Gulf crisis, the US hastened to pay its outstanding financial commitments to the UN, it reverted to its traditional tactics as soon as the military operation came to an end. Today, the US is the biggest UN debtor.

Many analysts failed to realise that from the very beginning of the Gulf crisis on 2 August 1990, the US had no intention of allowing the UN to tackle the crisis in accordance with the organisation's charter. Rather, the US strove to act as the UN's proxy in managing the crisis. In other words, the US wanted the UN to bless its policy in Iraq and the region. This aim was achieved in November 1990, when the Security Council passed a resolution giving the US a mandate to use force against Iraq. Immediately after this resolution, the White House and the US took the crisis over from the Security Council and the UN. Thereafter, all resolutions concerning the timing or suspension of military operations, the weapons used, the intensity of the attacks and even the conditions for a cease-fire were actually American resolutions. Between 29 November 1990 (when the mandate resolution was issued) and 3 April 1991 (when Resolution 687, stating the conditions for a permanent cease-fire, was passed), the Security Council was totally paralysed, apparently hostage to the US's dictates. The Council could not even convene to follow developments on the ground. Nor could it convene to discuss French and Russian initiatives for a peaceful settlement. The Council was only released to endorse Resolution 687. Former UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar commented, "This is not the UN's war... because the coalition forces that fought the war did not raise the UN flag... and their leadership was not subject to UN supervision and observation..."

It was no coincidence that in its draft resolution for a cease-fire, the US linked the lifting of comprehensive sanctions on Iraq with the complete elimination of weapons of mass destruction. To lift sanctions against Iraq another UN resolution would be required, since Kuwait had been liberated, and the US could always veto such a resolution if and when it was put on the table. In other words, the US can continue to impose its will on Iraq forever.

More importantly, the US claims that the resolution allowing it to use force against Iraq is still valid, and that there is no need for another mandate. Indeed, the US has struck Iraq twice since cease-fire was imposed, without the Security Council's clear permission. In the current crisis, the US continues to behave with the conviction that it has the right to use force unilaterally to compel Iraq to open its presidential palaces to UNSCOM inspectors.

This perplexing logic has no basis in the law. The Security Council's mandate regarding the use of force against Iraq was issued before the formation of UNSCOM, the UN committee entrusted with the job of inspecting the destruction of Iraq's military arsenal. Accordingly, there is no link between the UN mandate and the work of its inspectors, because the main, if not the only, objective of the mandate pertaining to the use of force was the liberation of Kuwait — nothing else. Second, the mandate pertaining to the use of force was issued specifically for the benefit of the international coalition formed during the Gulf crisis, not for the benefit of any specific country or group of countries that decided to bomb Iraq.

Whether one assumes that the mandate to use force against Iraq and UNSCOM's task are linked, however, or, on the contrary, believes that the mandate to use force does not give any member of the coalition that helped liberate Kuwait the right to use force against Iraq, the Security Council, in the final analysis, is the only body that should decide the size and type of offence committed and the force necessary to correct the offence. It is easy to imagine the global chaos that will ensue if each member of the coalition that helped liberate Kuwait — around 30 countries — unilaterally decides to bomb Iraq at will whenever it perceives that Iraq is attempting to impede the work of UNSCOM. From a purely legal point of view, there should be no use of force against Iraq without a fresh and unambiguous mandate from the Security Council to that effect. It follows, therefore, that the use of force against Iraq by any country, irrespective of its might, or group of countries, regardless of their number, amounts to an unequivocal act of aggression.

Turning to the inspections issue, it is obvious that a number of UNSCOM experts, particularly, Richard Butler, the chief inspector, are acting as agents of the US, independently of the UN's will. Some of UNSCOM's experts are former or current CIA operatives and clearly submit their reports to the US before the UN. Butler's statement that Iraq could destroy the population of Tel Aviv confirms that the head of UNSCOM does indeed work for an organisation — but it is not the UN. Butler has yet to include in his reports to the UN information to back his recent statement. Additionally, while a spate of criticism greeted Butler's controversial statement, the silence of the US and the secretary-general speaks volumes.

The US did indeed "hijack" the Security Council, both before and after the second Gulf War. The hijacking is still in progress, and the US is under the impression that, since the Council once gave it the right to handle the crisis, it cannot reclaim that right before a "permanent solution", as defined by the US, is reached. Ironically, the UN appears totally helpless in the face of the two interlinked issues of Iraq and Israel. In Iraq, the UN is attempting to induce the international community to legitimate Iraq's destruction by the US. In Israel, the UN aims to ensure that all is still and quiet as Palestine is destroyed. Both rivers flow to one sea: Israeli hegemony in the region.

How long will the world stand by and watch as these crimes take place? Russian President Boris Yeltsin recently warned that American insistence on a unilateral strike could lead to a third world war. Does this mean that a brave man is finally moving to release the hostage? or is this mere rhetoric? At the very least, it implies that a subtle change has taken place; until very recently, no one would have dared to even question the use of force on Iraq.

The first stage of the 1990 crisis elevated the UN to great heights. Today, it seems that the current, and perhaps final, stage of the crisis will be the UN's ruin.

The writer is a professor of political science at Cairo University.

To The Editor

Garaudy on trial

Sir- It is good to see that there has been such a response to the Garaudy trial in the Arab press, and I congratulate the *Weekly* on its many good contributions on this subject. However, I felt puzzled by the headline "Rushdie the second?" in the issue of 22-28 January. It is true that Salman Rushdie is also being persecuted for what he wrote, but I would suggest that this is where the similarity stops. Neither in substance nor in form do these cases have anything in common.

More important, though, is the nature of the support Garaudy is given in the Arab press, which suggests that it all hinges on him being a Muslim, a point which is capped by the absurd claim made by an Islamic human rights association contesting the right of the French court and magistrates to judge "the great Muslim thinker and philosopher". This reaction betrays ignorance of what the case is really about and may even be harmful, because now his detractors can pretend that Garaudy speaks and writes on behalf of the Arab-Muslim world and is their champion.

Whatever sympathies we might have with Garaudy the man, the issue here is the Gayssot Law itself and how such a law could be introduced and enacted in this day and age in a country like France, known for its defence of liberty, democracy and freedom of expression. This law is designed to protect a certain world view and make it sacrosanct and forbid intellectual inquiry. Why the law makers of France should have singled out Zionist ideology for such unique and anachronistic protection is beyond comprehension. It is equally preposterous that there are lawyers, men trained in logical thinking, who confuse attitudes towards an ideology serving a particular state, with common, primitive prejudices directed against individuals of another race. There can be no doubt what constitutes racism or racist slurs. "Anti-Semitism" is already a far more hazy concept, since the only scientifically acceptable meaning of "Semitic" is linguistic and includes a number of extinct and living languages, foremost among them Arabic, and by extension may refer to the people who speak those languages. However, the meaning of anti-Zionism is clear — it refers to the attitudes of those who disagree with the ideology of Zionism, just as one might disagree with communist ideology. The "crime" of Garaudy was to question the historical and factual basis of Zionist ideology, nothing more and nothing less. Up to the introduction of the Gayssot Law this was his legal right, as it is still his legal right to question any other kind of ideology or investigate any other historical events. As some writers have pointed out, he is even free to question the existence of God! It is in this perspective that the Garaudy case has to be seen, and only then can we grasp the enormity of the threat that such a law represents, for it returns us to the 16th century, the age of the Inquisition and witch hunts — and it gives the state of Israel legal powers over citizens of another country.

Gerda Mansour
Dokki

Traffic trauma

Sir- The policy of enlightened and environmentally attentive traffic departments around the world is to divert heavy, commercial traffic away from city centres and small city streets to the outskirts of the city. The exception to this general rule is Minya.

The Minya Traffic Department, with the approval of the City Council, has routed traffic into inner city streets without consulting the local residents whom this decision affects, ignoring the hundreds of complaints that their decision has generated.

In an attempt to clear the square in front of the Minya railway station, heavy commercial traffic has been rerouted away from the six-lane Railway Road (Saad Zaghloul), which runs north through Station Square alongside the railway line on the western edge of town, to Adli Yakan Street, a narrow street in the middle of town.

Railway Road has no buildings on the railway side and only three apartment buildings and several government agencies on the other side. No one normally parks on Railway Road as there are so few residents, no shops and almost no pedestrian traffic. More importantly, there are no intersections along this road.

Adly Yakan Street, on the other hand, was designed as a small residential street and has heavy pedestrian traffic, including young schoolchildren. It is lined on both sides of the street by innumerable shops, old residential buildings, six schools, the Central Minya Court House and the Red Crescent Emergency Ambulance Depot. It also has many intersections, on average one every 50 metres.

The enormity of the nightmare can be appreciated in that, in addition to the heavy trucks and other commercial traffic now rerouted to this narrow city street, it must also accommodate buses and mini-vans carrying some 24,000 students every day from the south of town and from the station to the university on the northern outskirts.

In this situation, pedestrians, particularly schoolchildren, are subject to both the very real threat of being run over at all hours of the day and the effects of the noxious fumes and noise polluting the street. The old buildings are exposed to severe vibrations that will cause rapid deterioration. The traffic jams in front of the Court House are a major security liability. The emergency ambulances often have long delays in getting out of their depot in response to emergency calls. And the resounding horns never stop.

The Traffic Department made a similar attempt in January 1997. By March, two of the old buildings had crumbled from the vibrations, closing Adly Yakan Street and Gomhouriya Street for several months. How many more buildings must collapse, or people die, for the Traffic Department to realise the rash nature of this enterprise?

The entire problem is caused by the total lack of training and effectiveness of the Traffic Department. They have no control over the local bus and microbus driver cartels which are the source of the problem. These drivers drive at any speed they like, often racing at over 80kph, three abreast, to be the first to pick up a fare. They stop how and where they choose, although elementary traffic planning and control methods prohibit bus stops and commercial depots within 30m of any intersection. If the Traffic Department could control these drivers by not allowing them to make stops within one block north and south of Station Square, there would be no tie-ups or traffic problems in the square, thereby enabling normal heavy traffic to feed easily north into Railway Road.

Rather than permitting hooligan drivers to do as they please, the Traffic Department should set up and monitor proper bus stops on the side of the road and at specified distances away from all intersections, for the drivers to queue at when they pick up or drop off their fares.

We call on the minister of environment, Nadia Makram Abeid, to help us rid our city streets of these potential dangers, pollution and unbearable noise.

The beleaguered residents of Minya

Al-Ahram Weekly





Csaba Király, possessed of Hungarian hands, and not as extinct as, right, the dodo

God bless the dodo

Piano recital Csaba Király. Gomhouriya Theatre, 7 Feb

David Blake watches Hungarian hands

You watch the hands of Hungarian pianists because they possess hidden power — they can strangle and do terrific mayhem. But you don't see them, they move too fast and are too subtle. Behind them lies a long history of hysterical deception.

Csaba Király, the young Hungarian pianist, has two hands though you can easily be forgiven for thinking he has three or four more. Yet he is no thunder clapper. They, in any case, tend to come along the Russian pianist production conveyer belt and Király is custom made in Budapest. He has passed through the Bartók School of Music and the Franz Liszt Academy, working with, among others, the pianist Zoltan Kocsis, a Liszt power house.

The concert was a three-layer affair and almost off-putting in its suggestion of a no holds barred power ploy. It began with the least weighty music of the concert and ended with the full muscle show of Liszt's gargantuan piano sonata in B minor. As if this were not enough, between these two jumbos came, of all things, the transcription for piano of Stravinsky's ballet *Petrushka*. Csaba Király's credentials for such a programme are of the highest. Hungarian music and musicians are noted for their courage, staying power and imagination. They have the immediacy of effect and genuine knock out power of the melodies and rhythms of the Czardas, the gypsy "zigeuner" and the Magyar. Unleashed, these three elemental forces form the strongest personality of any music, except the eastern originated flamenco. Untamed, the rhythms sweep through Western music like a gale from wide open spaces. They go from Liszt to Ligeti, galloping past Bartók en route, making a massive footprint on twentieth century music. And Király has played his part, having given the world premieres of Kurtag's double concerto with the London Sinfonietta and, in Hungary, of Giorgi Ligeti's piano concerto.

In spite of a steely technique, he has much more than the travelling virtuoso's bagfull of a few seasonal set pieces. He has the original musical outlook that marks all truly Hungarian pianists who hold fiercely to their rights as interpretive artists. At times they go far over the top, disappearing into stunt land, though even this is often done with sufficient bravado and technical brilliance to escape any criticism.

Király's Beethoven opus 101 was an example. It is a strong, capricious piece. It even falls foul of the routine sonata form at times and loses itself in meditations, then races off to climaxes with unexpected abandon. There are so many ways to play it and deal with its Sibylline like utterances and cynical answers to the problems set for the unfortunate player. It needs a cinematic eye to plot a pathway through. Király has a stern overview and went for architecture, form and speed. Beethoven's mysteries, and their expected answers, provide no clues. The pianist is left totally exposed. Technique will not help.

This player molded the first part, ignoring almost everything but the waywardness of its dramatic pauses and unequal tempi. Chords played, sometimes solid and wedge-like, darkly coloured then gentle. The music begins to sing and then darts into a scherzo with brashly powerful strikes and flashes. No time for reflection or philosophy. Stark.

The middle area of the work was hushed with the long finger runs Beethoven enjoyed to give pianists, intimations of things yet to come. There is no real form to the work at all, it is more a fantasia made up of rushes then hesitations, a dramatisation of the indecisive. This 101 is a musical forerunner of the "uncertainty principle". Emotion moves in all directions. It is thorny, like a pineapple, with the same acid sweet taste. The piano must find all this, and the player was equal to it. He never went for musical verbiage but an exact, stabbing precision.

Cool, bony Beethoven, who is a complex master with whom to come to terms. There was no time for regret. Only Bach-like fugue patterns were depicted. It was high-spirited and sharp-edged.

After this sonata, the pianist left the scene. One wonders if he went to complain about the thread bare arthritic chair he was sitting on. Seemingly not because he strode straight back to the piano without a moment's stop and thundered into the opening scene from the piano version of Stravinsky's *Petrushka*.

The celebrated melody of the snowy crowd scene with bears, horses, babies and toboganists all flashed up from the piano as if from the full orchestra, and that's the way it was till the end. We had visuals. *Petrushka* himself danced past and around us. The piano had gone. Kiraly's steel technique and hands, indeed all his body, disappeared. We had the very Russianness of the music obliterating all else, Király included. At times he appeared as in a cinematic flash, crouching over the keyboard, at others a figure up straight, hands in the air flying overhead, then down into the deep shadows of the platform itself. We went through the pathetic drama of the puppet's tragedy. What sort of a name is to be given to this kind of piano playing? Perhaps possession.

The moors' dusky music swayed and stuttered, the doll is transfixed, the soldier put to rout. Petrushka himself is no match for a cruel and vulgar world, but this world bobs and bustles on.

As in the ballet it begins to snow heavily. Stravinsky's musical miracle of the irony of the lovely roseate flakes ennobling even the brutes in boots and high fur hats slapping their thighs, indifferent to all but vodka and oblivion, was there. For the piano it needs also a miracle, this snow scene. Stravinsky makes it clear that the helpless have no graveyards, and so the cinematic piece came savagely to an end, uplifting but scarifying. An intermission was necessary for all for yet more was to come of a similar probing intensity — the block-like monument of the B minor sonata of Liszt. A dodo of historic importance.

Király began it with a show of great muscularity. His strong hands are good at grandeur, and so it began though it was not to continue like this. Something then appeared in the musical landscape of Liszt's often criticised "blousy baroque" masterpiece — something big, a mammoth from another era of historical time. After blundering and crashing about, it stood there in front of us, huge, vulnerable, helpless, naked and innocent. The pianist had stripped it down, demolished its covering and there it stood beginning another life directly in front of us.

Everyone big enough has a bash at the B minor. People strange enough rush in regardless, like newspapers making sure they get a good shot of the corpse. But this mammoth was getting none of the usual obituary line. It was looking for someone to love or be loved by. Király didn't seem to love it but he understood it.

There come moments in music when things go beyond pity — they just have to be accepted. There is nothing visual or anecdotal about this work. Király gave it a try and almost brought it off.

The B minor is not sure of itself. At the climax it falters and this is no fault of the pianist. Liszt was not Mozart. Horowitz could stagger the world with his performance of the B minor when in his twenties, but he was afraid of Mozart all his life. In this strange fantasia everything seems to be lying in wait for something else, but nothing comes. With pellucid finger work and noble spaces Király brought off his own miracle, a loving sympathetic shot about a failed and extinct species. God bless the dodo.

Books

The vagaries of history

The July Revolution Files: 122 Testimonies, Tarek Habib. Cairo: Al-Ahram Centre for Translation and Publication, 1997

Key players: the Revolutionary Command Council

It is certainly very interesting to be presented with a glimpse of modern history through the testimonials not only of those who made it but those whose lives were shaped by events. And to have achieved this, which is exactly what Tarek Habib does in his book *The July Revolution Files*, is no small feat.

To speak of Habib as the author of this volume would to be guilty of an inaccuracy. He is, rather, the compiler, since the current volume comprises the observations, thoughts and insights of 122 people, either directly or indirectly connected to the revolution.

And one of the strengths of Habib's method lies in the very broad spectrum of not only the people interviewed but also the subjects covered.

Interviewees range from family members of the pre-revolutionary rulers of Egypt to members of the Revolutionary Council and participants in the Free Officers Movement, the catalyst to the July Revolution. In addition, there is a fair smattering of people whose actual connection to political events is more tangential. The testimonies of Egyptian and non-Egyptians are duly recorded, of writers, actresses, painters, businessmen and ex-ministers. And, necessarily, religious figures also figure prominently.

As for the subjects covered, they range from the preparation for the July '52 Revolution to the deposing of King Farouk, the rise of Abdel-Nasser, Arab unity and the continuing struggle against imperialism. The book also covers the 1967 defeat and deals in detail with the death of Abdel-Hakim Amer, the then minister of war (defence), and the second man to Nasser.

Such a method inevitably leads to the recording of a great many contradictory statements. Yet there can be no doubt that such contradictions, rather than undermining a text such as this, act to enhance its veracity. The contradictions that exist in the book are real, in as much as they are felt and believed.

"Was Abdel-Nasser a member of the Muslim Brotherhood?" interviewees are asked. "Never" — says one. "Of course," says another.

Another important aspect of this book consist of the material arranged into 14 sections. These range from "Zero Hour", the actual planning for the revolution, to "Nasser is Victorious", and the "Turn to Socialism".

These files chronicle the making of modern Egyptian history.

It is a chronicle that appears to contain as many contradictions as the interviews, contradictions prefaced on similar discrepancies in the perspectives of those who took part. The impression one gets is not that anyone is deliberately being economical, or twisting the truth. Instead, they are privileging their own version of events over equally plausible but competing versions. It is, therefore, a factual account of events, in as much as those events are open to a multiplicity of interpretations.

Towards the end of the book comes a particularly interesting section concerning Field Marshal Abdel-Hakim Amer. Here, the complex and intricate nature of the relationship that existed between Nasser and Amer is explored in all its twists and turns.

Some say that Amer was governing his own state, not implementing Nasser's decisions, but his own. Others insist that the field marshal was not qualified to hold the positions he held. According to one interviewee, his prominent position was based on political motives and not practical ones.

Certainly there can be little doubt that the pulse, the fast moving tempo of this book, is a product of Tarek Habib's TV background. For in the end it reads like the transcript of a particularly intriguing talk show. The pages speak, and Habib asks all the right questions. The pace is fast, the guests are controversial, and the result is very informative.

Reviewed by ***Hamdi Saad El-Din***

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Kamal Khalifa
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 7.30pm-10.30pm; Fri 7.30pm-10.30pm. Until 13 Feb.

Indian Jewellery
Saladin Ballroom, Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. 12-16 Feb, 10am-3pm & 5pm-10pm. For more information, contact the Indian Embassy, tel 392 5162.

Hala Album (Paintings)
Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Cooperation, 11 Shagaret El-Dorr St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419. Daily 10am-3pm & 4pm-9pm. Until 19 Feb.

Lara Baladi (Photographs)
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 Feb.
Shots taken during the filming of Youssef Chahine's *El-Masir* under the title Mon Destin.

Beat Presser (Photographs)
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St (ex-Bustan St), Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 20 Feb.
A selection of photographs by the Swiss artist who worked together with Werner Herzog during the shooting of *Fitzcarraldo* and *Cobra Verde* in Peru and Ghana.

Physician as Artist
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Opening 16 Feb, 8pm. Daily exc Fri, 10am-2.30pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 21 Feb.
An exhibition of paintings and drawings featuring the works of Dr Farid Fadel (ophthalmologist), Essam El-Koosy (surgeon) and Tawfik Helmy (dentist).

Hamdi Abdallah (Drawings) **& Fathy Ahmed** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 21 Feb.

Wim Wenders (Photographs)
Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University, Dokki. Opening 16 Feb. Daily until 22 Feb.
Works by the German director and photographer.

Collective Exhibition
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 Feb.
Sixty-two works by 31 prominent Italian contemporary artists under the title Line-Colour-Dream.

Gazbia Sirry
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 5.30pm-9pm. Until 24 Feb.
Paintings under the title Internal Migration.

Ahmed Mounib (Paintings)
Mubarak Public Library, 4 El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11am-7pm. Until 25 Feb.
Works under the title A Dialogue Between Nature and the Artist.

Margo Veillon
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 10am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 25 Feb.
Paintings under the title L'Image du Reve et de L'Imagination.

Jeanette El-Wakeel
Sony Gallery, American University in Cairo, Main Campus, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 26 Feb.
Thirty-six colour photographs by the American photographer portraying life, especially of children, on the streets, lanes, fields and marketplaces in and around Cairo.

Mohamed Hussein Hosny
Maulana Abul-Kalam Azad Centre for Indian Culture, 23 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 392 5243. Opening 17 Feb. Daily 12 noon-6pm. Until 26 Feb.
Photographs of India celebrating the country's golden jubilee of independence.

Abdel-Wahab Morsi (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghrabi Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-3pm & 4.30pm-9pm. Until 27 Feb.
Works under the title Egyptian Sonnet.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

14 Feb, 7pm: **Otello** (1986). Directed by Zeffirelli, with P. Domingo and J. Diaz.
15 Feb, 7pm: **Satyricon** (1969). Directed by Fellini, with M. Potter and H. Keller.

Forest of The Little Bear
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 12 Feb, 6pm.
Directed by Toshio Goto.

Woyzeck
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Bab El-Louq. Tel 575 9877. 12 Feb, 6.30pm.
Directed by Werner Herzog (1979), with Klaus Kinski.

El-Motamarredoun (The Rebels)
Goethe Institute, as above. 17 Feb, 6.30pm.
Directed by Tawfik Saleh (1968).

Women in French Cinema
Ewart Hall, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373.
14 Feb, 8pm: **Ma Saison Preferée** (1993). With Catherine Deneuve.
15 Feb, 6pm: **Ma Saison Preferée**, as above.
15 Feb, 8pm: **Casque D'Or** (1952). With Simone Signoret.
16 Feb, 6pm: **Les Choses de la Vie** (1970). With Romy Schneider.
16 Feb, 8pm: **Le Journal d'une Femme de Chambre** (1963). With Jeanne Moreau.
17 Feb, 6pm: **Le Juge et L'Assassin** (1975). With Isabelle Huppert.
17 Feb, 8pm: **Les Parapluies de Cherbourg** (1963). With Catherine Deneuve.
18 Feb, 6pm: **Mauvais Sang** (1985). With Juliette Binoche.
18 Feb, 8pm: **Casque D'Or**, as above.

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

Tomorrow Never Dies
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Pierce Bronson stars as the new 007.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Drive In, entrance of El-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6.30pm & 9.30pm; Thur & Fri midnight show. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba I II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
With Adel Imam and Youssra, directed by Sherif Arafa.

Women in French Cinema

Tamanta wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos II, 12 Em-[illegible] *St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.*
With Nadia El-Guidi and Farouq El-Fishawi, directed by Nader Galal.

Hysteria
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Ahmed Zaki and Abla Kamel, directed by Adel Adib.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
The largest box-office hit in the history of Egyptian cinema, with Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

DANCE

Le Corsaire
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 12-16 Feb, 8pm, exc 14 Feb, 11am.
The Cairo Opera Ballet Company, choreographed by Abdel-Moneim Kamel, and the Cairo Opera Orchestra, conducted by Ivan Filev, perform.

The Zolo Dance Company
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 392 9956. 16-19 Feb, 9pm.

MUSIC

National Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926. 12 Feb, 8pm.
Selim Sahab.

Jazz Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya Sq, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 12 & 13 Feb, 9pm.
Yehia Khalil performs.

Roberto Cominati
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 13 Feb, 8pm.
The Italian pianist performs selections from Scarlatti, Chopin, Scriabin and Ravel.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 Feb, 8pm.
Performing Saint Saens's concerto no. 2, selections from Tchaikovsky and Adel Afifi, with pianist Roberto Cominati, conducted by Sayed Awad.

Song Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 14 Feb, 8pm.
Italian chamber and operatic pieces performed by Iman Mostafa, Nashwa Ibrahim, Walid Karim, Mohamed Abul-Kheir and Abdel-Wahab Sayed.

Violin and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 15 Feb, 8pm.
Othman El-Mahdi performs.

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 Feb, 8pm.

Musical Youth Concert
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 Feb, 8pm.

Demis Roussos
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 17-19 Feb, 8pm.

THEATRE

Betrayal
Wallace Theatre, Greek Campus, American University in Cairo, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 6373. 15, 16 & 19 Feb, 8pm. 13, 14, 20 & 21 Feb, 6pm.
An examination of modern relationships written by Harold Pinter and directed by Eric Grischk.

Komour
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. 15-19 Feb, 7pm.
A Franco-Egyptian production directed by Ossama Raouf.

El-Tayeb Wel-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
El-Salam Theatre, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Ballo (Fanfare)
Madinat Nasr Theatre, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 8.30pm; Thur, 9.30pm.
With Salah El-Saadani, Samah Anwar, Mahmoud El-Guendi, Ashraf Abdel-Baqi, Hala Fakher, Hussein El-Imam, Hassan El-Asmar and Sommaya.

Allahom Eg'aloh Kheir (May All End Well)
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 390 7707. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Lenin El-Ramly, with poetry by Sayed Hegab, the play is directed by Mohsen Helmy. With Ali El-Haggar, Rania Farid Shawqi, Ashraf Abdel-Ghafour, Abdel-Rahman Abu Zahra.

Alabanda
El-Fardous Theatre, El-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

Wallah Zaman Ya Fatma (It's Been So Long, Fatma)
El-Salam Theatre, Youssef Idris Hall, Qasr El-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily 10pm.
Abir El-Sharqawi, Mohamed Abdel-Razeq and Mohamed Abdin perform in a production scripted by Fouad Haggag and directed by Hossameddin Salah.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 3863952. Daily 8.30; Wed & Thur, 10pm.
With Adel Imam.

LECTURES

Wim Wenders and The New German Film
Faculty of Applied Arts, Helwan University, Dokki. 16 Feb, 4pm.
Lecture by Dr Anwar Khorshed, professor of cinema and television, Helwan University. The lecture will be followed by the screening of Wenders' *Alice in the Cities* (1973), with English subtitles.

Archaeopalynological Studies of The Mud Brick from The Giza Plateau
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council, 192 El-Nil St, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. 16 Feb, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Sekina Ayyad, assistant professor of palynology and plant ecology, Mansoura University.

The Norm, Between The Normal and The Exceptional
CEDEJ, 14 Dr Abdel-Rahman El-Sawi (ex-Gam'eyet El-Nisr) St, Mohandessin. Tel 361 1932. 17 Feb, 5pm.
Lecture in French by Professor Pierre Livet, University of Provence.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo.
Tel 5786064.
Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Around the galleries



Mabrouk Ismail Mabrouk

GALLERY space at the **Italian Cultural Institute** was given over to a collective exhibition of works by **Abdel-Nasser Shiha, Mabrouk Ismail Mabrouk, Regina Youssef, Rehab Mohamed** and **Nazih Rashid**. If there was a focus to this exhibition, it was mostly on naive, spontaneous art, the epitome of which is, undoubtedly, Mabrouk.

The wide range of media — batik, sculpture, pottery and carved wooden plates — made for a varied exhibition and indicated that often, the less contrived the original vision, the more moving and direct the result.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***

Boxed in by books: Cairo's International Book Fair continues to pull in the punters and provide shelter from the rain

Wet weather, full tent

Culture culture everywhere, but not a drop to drink? **Hala Halim** attended the Book Fair's seminar on the particular brands of culture presented in the pages of the press

A promising seminar topic notwithstanding — "Newspaper Culture Pages" — the Cultural Café tent was all but deserted, with the exception of a handful of cultural journalists there to cover the event. The panelists, cultural editors and journalists themselves, were loathe to address such a minuscule, in-house audience. Then the heavens opened and the sudden downpour brought a crowd of fair-goers into the water-proof tent, prompting wise-cracks about nature being in the service of art.

Opening proceedings, moderator Shaaban Youssef defined the parametres of the debate: newspaper culture pages as opposed to cultural magazines and journals, because the former reach the general reader, and thus contribute to forming his or her consciousness. Identifying the current problems of newspaper cultural journalism as he sees them — the sensationalist titles, the cliquishness and private agendas of editors, among other things — Youssef offered the paradigm against which the whole endeavour was to be defined: late novelist and critic Abdel-Fattah El-Gamal's editorship of the literary page in *El-Missa* in the 1960s which launched a new generation of hitherto unknown writers. Indeed, throughout most of the session, El-Gamal's name would be invoked, with the nostalgia for a perceived Golden Age.

The first speaker was Magdi Hassanein, a culture editor in the weekly *Al-Ahali* (the voice of the left-wing Tagammu Party) since 1984 and one-time managing editor of the literary journal *Adab Wa Naqd* (Literature and Criticism). The experience of *Al-Ahali*, Hassanein explained, had a certain specificity, in that the left-wing newspaper draws a particular readership assumed to have a modicum of culture. "During Ramadan, for example, most national dailies, with the exception of *Al-Akhbar*... cancel their culture pages, as if there is a contradiction between the Holy Month and culture."

Yet Hassanein was not about to claim that *Al-Ahali*'s culture pages had not fallen victim, at times, to "the tyranny of editors-in-chief". Regular readers of *Al-Ahali* will remember the very successful four-page culture spread entitled "Kashkoul Al-Ahali", launched a few years ago and then inexplicably discontinued, with all matters cultural being crammed into a single page. Alluding to these vicissitudes, and pointing out that culture pages are the first to be encroached upon when advertising space is needed, Hassanein lamented: "How I wish I had lived in the age when Abdel-Fattah El-Gamal supervised *El-Missa*'s culture pages... none of the writers whom he launched are trying to give the new generation a chance."

Emad El-Ghazali of the liberal-oriented *Wafd* newspaper's culture page, commiserated with Hassanein: "Editors-in-chief don't like culture pages." As for the editors of culture pages, El-Ghazali suggested that because most are writers, they gear their pages towards literature, overlooking the other arts and giving full reign to their politicking. Another problem he deplored was the tendency of editors to cater for "what they think the reader wants and not what he needs. And for the situation to change, editors should be changed quite simply." To demonstrate, El-Ghazali cited the culture page of the London-based, pan-Arab daily *Al-Hayat*, for which he worked for a spell, comparing the international outlook of its coverage and the parochialism of cultural journalism in the local papers. It was partly a question of training and formation as well as of budget, he explained. Editors of culture pages in Egypt, El-Ghazali elaborated, work with a very small team of journalists and do not attempt to train or develop them. If El-Ghazali saw any way out of the impasse, it was in the example of the culture page editors (and fellow panelists) of the tabloid-style *Al-Dustour* and *Al-Osboue*, who were young, had a fresh vision and as yet did not seem to have developed their own agendas.

Before calling the next speaker, moderator Shaaban Youssef picked up the thread of culture pages in pan-Arab newspapers as opposed to local ones, bringing out the economic element that determines, to an extent, quality and professionalism. Often, he said, he would read two articles by the same author on the same topic, one in a local paper and the other in *Al-Hayat* or *Al-Quds* and find that the version published in the pan-Arab paper is far superior. Referring to the fact that most of the Arabic press based outside the Arab world is run by Syro-Lebanese editors, Youssef underscored that "the point is not that the Levantines are clever-clever, but that they don't expect you to write for free."

The stage had been set for Hamdi Abdel-Rehim, the young, flashily witty culture editor of the somewhat confrontationalist — some would say sensationalist — the weekly *Al-Dustour*. "I do not have any problems," began Abdel-Rehim. "My editor-in-chief is not tyrannical, in fact he lets me do just as I please." Having said that, Abdel-Rehim went on to explain that he did in fact have problems, but with the situation in general. Quoting a parable from Islamic history about the theft of a rare copy of the Qur'an and the lamentation it caused, he asked: "Well, who is responsible [for conditions of cultural journalism]?" He firmly placed the blame on the editors of culture pages. His "problem" with the cultural journalism scene was "the cliquishness that has developed into full-fledged militias, armed with the power of one's friends, of the book series one supervises, of trips abroad, and so on." In *Al-Dustour*, asserted Abdel-Rehim, "we seek confrontations, we tell the talented that they are talented and the lacking in talent that they are without talent." But there were bills to be paid for that: "the militias", claimed Abdel-Rehim, "withhold news from us as well as books, and I can't go around buying all new books and the only news that reaches me is either very official or passé."

Abdel-Rehim then launched a ferocious attack at the status quo of cultural journalism. "The group that gathers at a certain café mysteriously materialises on the culture pages of a given newspaper. When an important critic writes a lengthy critique about a poetry collection, it is assumed that the collection will be sold out, but it doesn't because the important critic has lost his credibility." The attack then developed into a form of rabble-raising demagogy: "There is this spirit of nihilism, despite the fact that this nation is possessed of all the prerequisites for revival... they have not announced — nor will they announce — the death of the Arabs: Abdel-Nasser is still with us, so are Umm Kulthum, Al-Mutanabbi, Khaled Mohieddin... we are the Egyptians who have breached the Bar Lev Line... Egypt is still abused, Palestine is still occupied." Casting himself as a lone prophet of culture, Abdel-Rehim went on in plaintive tones: "Why do I feel I am ploughing the sea, that I am calling to prayer in Malta?"

Alluding to announcements of the death of the grand narrative, and having prescribed national issues as the cause of the novel, Abdel-Rehim then turned to another *bete noire*: Westernised literary critics who use terms that they themselves do not understand, "let alone an Upper Egyptian reader who has no idea about deconstruction".

"These critics climb up the pipes of the houses of Western critics, they break in, filch a few terms, return and break in Naguib Mahfouz with a handful of terms they sprinkle over him."

Making no secret of his disapproval of Abdel-Rehim's tone and "choice of words — words that we find on the pages of *Al-Dustour*". Youssef then made a few insinuations tacitly intended to burst a few *Dustour* bubbles. "There is this sentence by Barthes to the effect that he has no use for honest people who are practically useless. I'd say newspapers depend on dishonest people — those who launch attacks right, left and centre without conscience — which of course is not meant as a comment [on Abdel-Rehim]."

In sharp contrast to Abdel-Rehim was the following speaker, Ossama Afifi of *Al-Osboue*, who began by expressing a few reservations about the seminar itself, reservations that targeted the politicking involved in the composition of the panel.

"The organisers of this seminar have overlooked many key-figures in the field of Egyptian cultural journalism... of which we [the panelists] are not representative; our experiences are smaller than those of the national dailies... a pity because it is an important seminar and the Book Fair is important."

Afifi then made two points of order. The first had to do with the confusion between different kinds of cultural pages: the literary, the artistic and the broadly cultural. As for the paradigm of Abdel-Fattah El-Gamal, Afifi suggested that the experience of *Al-Missa* was a product of a certain historical moment and that it would be frustrating, dwarfing even, to take it out of its context and lament that it has no parallel in a present defined by very different conditions. Nor was Abdel-Fattah El-Gamal's the only experience of an open, fostering culture page, said Afifi, adding that there are more recent examples including novelist Gamal El-Ghitani's culture page in *Al-Akhbar* which challenged the political taboos placed on certain writers and introduced Arab authors at a time when the slogan was "Egypt for the Egyptians".

While he would not shrug off the cliquishness of culture editors, Afifi set it in a larger context. "What is more dangerous is that there is no unified, coherent body of intellectuals now as was the case in the '60s, '70s and '80s... The official cultural establishment has greatly expanded and wants to monopolise culture for its own ends, following the principle of 'he who is not with me is against me', withholding information, books, invitations to events that need to be covered, withholding advertisements even... and there is no support from the intellectuals as a collective entity". The imbalance created by this dynamic, in Afifi's view, was responsible for the sensationalism and confusion attendant on cultural journalism. The intellectual block, he asserted, should be capable of safeguarding journalists from these practices, "had it not been for the fact that nowadays each is an island unto himself: each intellectual has become his own independent institution." If Afifi prescribed anything, it was that the cultural movement as a whole, "of which cultural editors are only a part," should adopt a supportive stance on national issues broached in the newspapers. But then the topic was such a vast and vital one, Afifi concluded, that this seminar ought to have been considered a preliminary one.

It had stopped raining outside, and the seminar, having spilled over into the slot of time allotted the following one soon ended.



photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Out in the markets

Rania Khallaf listens to the woes of a number of Arab publishers

The first week of the 30th Cairo International Book Fair has witnessed a reasonable turn out, particularly when compared to last year, when the event unfortunately coincided with the holy month of Ramadan. The exhibition halls are crowded, especially at noon when a great deal of attention appears to being paid to the fast food and sandwich stores, rather than to the shelves of books. Perhaps it is the price of new books, as compared to sandwiches, that encourages this picnic atmosphere.

Students from Asian countries, in Egypt to study Arabic, rush by carrying plastic bags stuffed to overflowing with religious books. Yet others seem to prefer the stalls organised by the General Egyptian Book Organisation (GEBO), not least, one suspects, because they produce volumes at reasonable prices.

The number of Arab publishers exhibiting at this year's event is particularly disappointing, though hardly surprising, given circumstances in Libya, Sudan, Algeria and Iraq. According to Mustafa Lagha, director of Al-Da'wa Al-Islamiya Publishing House, one of only four Libyan publishers attending the event, the boycott imposed on Libya has taken a heavy toll on the country's intellectual life. The publication of books, he laments, has become a very expensive undertaking.

"To participate in this year's Book Fair we had to travel overland, covering some 1,900km, together with all our stock."

Other regional publishers attending take a more positive view. Khalil Hanna, general supervisor of Dar Al-Jeel, the largest among the 20 publishing houses representing Lebanon, considers the Cairo event the second most important in his company's calendar, following Frankfurt. According to Hanna, the Cairo Book Fair offers "a very good chance for Arab publishers to meet and conclude favourable deals."

Hanna did not, however, see everything as a bed of roses. Customs clearance fees, he complained, had reached LE150 per box of books, an increase that publishers were forced to pass on to their customers.

"Although we are very keen to participate every year, we face increasing obstacles, including increased customs fees and discrimination between Egyptian and non-Egyptian publishers who have to pay three times the amount for exhibition space than that charged to local publishers," said Abdel-Hadi Nather from Morocco. "The aims of Arab cultural unity and integration are now hollow slogans as far as the regional publishing industry is concerned," he added.

Distribution appears to be a major concern among many Arab publishers. Ne'ama Ghabry, coordinator of the Yemeni exhibitors, reflected that attendance at international book fairs is one of the few ways for publishers in Yemen to market their products. International book fairs also provided one of the few opportunities to access the products designed to cater to other national markets. According to Sahel Al-Agamy, director of marketing at the Kuwaiti National Council for Arts and Literature, there is a general dearth of books throughout the Gulf relating to the culture of the Maghreb. "Yet there seems," he said, "to be little concern paid to such discrepancies on the part of the Arab Publishers' Union."

As far as local distribution is concerned, Samir Sarhan, chairman of GEBO, had earlier announced that the Publishers' Union would this year discuss the possibility of forming a giant company, capitalised at over LE100 million, which would work in cooperation with Al-Akhbar, Al-Ahram, and the major publishing houses. The company would also provide funding for a large number of small kiosks to be set up so as to increase the public's access to books.

Plain Talk

In my book *Under Egypt's Spell* and in the regular column I write in *Al-Ahram* I have dealt widely with English writers and creative artists who fell under the spell of my country. They were all literary men and women who lived in or visited Egypt and who were so impressed by the country that it became either the subject of, or a major influence on, their works.

One area, though, that has so far escaped my attention is the way in which Egypt seems to have exerted her spell over scientists as well as literary types. This gap was forcibly brought to mind when I attended an interesting event organised to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Swedish botanist Vivi Täckholm, an Egyptian-Swedish symposium attended by leading scientists and personalities from both countries.

But who was this scientist whose centennial could draw to Egypt so many international luminaries, including the director-general of the Swedish Institute, and a gaggle of press people, including leading journalists and television crews?

Vivi Täckholm, who died in 1978, devoted more than 50 years of her life to teaching at the Botany Department at Cairo University. She was responsible for establishing the Herbarium, and led many expeditions to various parts of Egypt with the aim of recording the country's flora. According to Mohamed El-Qassas, one of her younger collaborators, she collected thousands of examples of Egyptian flora, and the results of her research appeared in the monumental four volume edition, *Flora of Egypt*, an essential reference book for botanists. In addition to this colossal work she also produced, in response to requests from students, a smaller, abridged version. The *Students' Flora of Egypt*, first published in 1956, was revised in 1974.

In 1925-26 she embarked on setting up the Cairo University Herbarium, which covers plant species not just in Egypt but throughout the Middle East. The Herbarium is, largely thanks to Vivi Täckholm's persistence, the largest botanical library in Africa.

In addition to scientific publications, Täckholm also wrote books for children in Swedish, and produced both guidebooks and volumes on Egypt's cultural history for the general reader. Indeed, her house in Cairo became an essential stopping off point on the itinerary of a large number of Scandinavian tourists.

On the occasion of her 60th birthday, Vivi Täckholm received the Order of the Nile, the highest decoration that Egypt bestows. She received a great many honours, too, in her native Sweden.

At the reception held by the Swedish ambassador to mark the symposium I met two Egyptian artists who had known Vivi, Abdel-Rahman El-Khatib, the musician, and Hassan Heshmat, the sculptor. El-Khatib, a resident of Sweden, told me how Vivi always went out of her way to help and encourage Egyptians in Sweden. "She really loved Egypt, and regarded herself as one of its people," he said.

Hassan Heshmat is the sculptor responsible for the beautiful mounted plaque bearing the head of Vivi that will be placed in the Botany Department of Cairo University. What better memorial, I thought, could there be for this dedicated scientist who fell so deeply under the spell of Egypt.

Mursi Saad El-Din

30th Cairo International Book Fair: seminar programme

Venue: Saraya Al-Istithmar, International Fair Grounds, Nasr City

Thurs 12

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Ana Wal-Nissa (Women and I)
Author Kamel Zoheiri discusses his book with Iqbal Baraka, Lewis Greiss and Fatma Moussa
2.30pm-4.30pm
Seminar on "Global economy"
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Governor of Cairo Abdel-Rehim Shehata
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Nizar Qabbani
9pm
Poetry reading

Fri 13

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Sirat Al-Qahira (the translation of Stanley Lane-Poole's work on Cairo)
Panelists: Gamal El-Ghitani, Kamel Zoheiry, Khairy Shalabi, Younan Labib Rizk and Raouf Abbas
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "The challenges of globalism"
Panelists: Amany Qandil, Fahmy Howeidi, Hisham El-Sherif, Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, El-Sayed Yassin and Alieddin Helal
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Abdel-Moneim Omara, head of the Supreme Council of Youth and Sports. Theme: "Youth and sports"
Panelists: Said Sonbol, Ibrahim Issa and Salah Montasser
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Ahmed Shoubeir, Sayed Zaher, Reda Abdel-Al, Mahmoud El-Khatib and Hamada Imam
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Amgad Nasser (Jordan), Badr Tawfiq (Egypt) and Mamdouh Adwan (Syria)

Sat 14

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Afaq Al-Asr (Horizon of the Age)
Author Gaber Asfour discusses his work with El-Sayed Yassin, Salah Fadl, Shoukry Ayyad and Mahmoud Amin El-Alem
2.30pm-4.30pm
Seminar on "Arab culture in dialogue with international cultures"
Panelists: Bahaa Taher, Hassan Hanafi, Salah Fadl, Mahmoud Ragab, Gamal El-Ghitani, Hoda Wasfi and Gaber Asfour
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Economy Youssef Boutros Ghali
Panelists: Refaat El-Said, Alieddin Helal and Heba Handoussa
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar Mohamed Sayed Tantawi
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Samih Al-Qassem (Palestine), Mohamed Ibrahim Abu Senna (Egypt) and Malika Al-Assemy (Morocco). Readings also by: Ahmed El-Shahawi, Zein El-Abedin Fouad, Abdel-Sattar Selim, Mohamed Adam and Mohamed Eid Ibrahim

Sun 15

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Shabab Al-Masri Al-Moaaser wa Azmat Al-Qeyam (Contemporary Egyptian Youth and the Moral Crisis)
Author Nadia Radwan discusses her work with Samir Naim, Mona Makram Ebeid, Sarwat Eshaq and Samir Gharib
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "Youth and the issue of national belonging"
Panelists: Mosaad Sayed Eweiss, Gamal Zahran, Nadia Radwan, Alieddin Helal, Mona Makram Ebeid and Galal Amin
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Supply Ahmed El-Goweli
Panelists: Essam Refaat, Mahmoud El-Tohamy and Galal Dowidar
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Roger Garoudi. Moderator: Ali El-Ghetiet
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Amal El-Sayer (Qatar) and Mohamed Abu Doma (Egypt). Readings also by: Gamal El-Shaer, Fawzy Khedr, Fawzy Eissa, Mefreh Karim and Yousri Hassan

Mon 16

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar: *Al-Tagha wal-Bogha* (Tyrants and Oppressors)
Author Gamal Badawi discusses his book with Salah Eissa, Tareq El-Beshri and Mokhtar El-Seweifi
2.30pm-4.30pm
Seminar on "The Arabs and cultural pluralism"
Panelists: El-Tayeb Salih, Ghada Al-Semman, Mohieddin El-Lazeqani, Selman El-Askari, Gaber Asfour, Abdaf Soueif and Salah Fadl
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Minister of Education Hussein Kamel Bahaaeddin.
Theme: "Challenges facing education at the turn of the third millennium"
Panelists: Hamed Ammar, Kamel Zoheiry, Ragab El-Banna and Mohamed Galal
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Youssef El-Qa'id
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Ahmed Soweilam (Egypt) and Mohamed Ali Shamseddin (Lebanon). Readings also by: Shawqi Heikal, Gamil Abdel-Rahman, Abdel-Latif Abdel-Halim, Mohamed Abdel-Qader and Mounir Fawzy

Tues 17

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Wadaan Lel-Tabaqa Al-Wosta (Adieu to the Bourgeoisie)
Author Ramzi Zaki discusses his work with Abdel-Basset Abdel-Moeti, Adel Hammouda, Mohamed El-Sayed Said and Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil
2.30pm-4.30pm
Seminar on "Woman's role in national work"
Panelists: Sekina Fouad, Eqbal Baraka, Farida El-Naqqash, Mona Makram Ebeid, Kamel Zoheiry, Fatheyia El-Assal, Leila Takla and Mona Ragab
5pm-7pm
Testimonies: Minister of Rural Development Mahmoud El-Sherif. Panelists: Hassanein Abdel-Raziq, Abdel-Moneim Said, Sekina Fouad and Ragab El-Banna
7pm-9pm
Open forum with Pope Shenouda III
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Ahmed Fouad Negm (Egypt), Onsy El-Haag (Lebanon) and Zeleikha Abu Risha (Jordan). Readings also by: Ibrahim Abdel-Fattah, Ossama Afifi, Abdel-Aziz Mowafi, Mohamed Farid Abu Se'da and Kamal Ammar

Wed 18

12noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Mawaqef Naqdeiya Min Al-Torath (Critical Stances on Heritage)
Author Mahmoud Amin El-Alem discusses his work with Gaber Asfour, Abdel-Moti Bayoumi, Nouran El-Gazeiri and Magdi Abdel-Hafez
2.30-4.30pm
Seminar on "The future of cinema"
Panelists: Inas El-Degheidi, Rafiq El-Sabban, Mohamed Khan, Wahid Hamed, Sherif Arafa and Hussein Fahmy
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Presidential Advisor Ossama El-Baz
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Ossama Anwar Okasha
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: Hassan Abdalla Al-Qersh (Saudi Arabia), Sayed Hegab (Egypt) and Mohamed El-Faytouri (Sudan) Readings also by: Mahdi Moustafa, Mohamed El-Husseiny, Megahed Abdel-Moneim Megahed and Emad Abdel-Mohssen

Thur 19

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Al-Nil Hayat Nahr (the Arabic translation of Émile Ludwig's book on the Nile)
Panelists: Roushdy Said, Mahmoud Abu Zeid, Milad Hanna and Sobhi Abdel-Hakim
2.30pm-4.30pm
Seminar on "The future of theatre"
Panelists: Nehad Seleiha, Galal El-Sharqawi, Lenin El-Ramli and Mohamed Subhi
5pm-7pm
Seminar on "The plastic arts and social issues in the next century"
Panelists: Hamdi Abdella, Samir Gharib, Mostafa El-Razaz and Makram Henein
7pm-9pm
Testimonies: Farouq Khorshed
9pm
Poetry reading. Guests of honour: El-Monsef Al-Wahhabi (Tunisia), Mohamed Mahran El-Sayed (Egypt) and Maysoun Saqr (Emirates). Readings also by: Iman Mersal, Shafiq Salloum and Sayed Khamis

Fri 20

12 noon-2pm
Author and work seminar:
Asrar Ilm Al-Jinat (The Secret of Genetics)
Auhtor Abdel-Basset El-Gamal discusses his work with Ossama Ghannam, Samir Hanna Sadq and Wassim El-Sisi
5pm-7pm
Open forum with Samir Sarhan

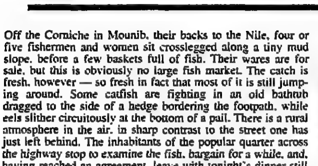
All information correct at time of going to press, though changes to programme are likely to occur

Adrift on the Nile



photos: Mohamed Wassim

In the rush to develop and industrialise, the few natural spots of greenery remaining in Cairo may seem superfluous to urban planners, the inhabitants' way of life an anachronism in the late twentieth century, or at best a bit of "local colour". But if these, too, disappear, warns **Fayza Hassan**, the concrete jungle — and its dog-eat-dog ethic — will have won



Off the Corniche in Mounib, their backs to the Nile, four or five fishermen and women sit crosslegged along a tiny mud slope, before a few baskets full of fish. Their wares are for sale, but this is obviously no large fish market. The catch is fresh, however — so fresh in fact that most of it is still jumping around. Some catfish are fighting in an old bathtub dragged to the side of a hedge bordering the footpath, while eels slither circuitously at the bottom of a pail. There is a rural atmosphere in the air, in sharp contrast to the street one has just left behind. The inhabitants of the popular quarter across the highway stop to examine the fish, bargain for a while, and, having reached an agreement, leave with tonight's dinner still squirming in a scrap of newspaper.

The fishermen live on the small island right across the slightly murky arm of the river which can only be crossed by boat, usually courtesy of *Amm* Galal, who, for a few piastres, rows the inhabitants back and forth.

Having negotiated the small strip of water, one is suddenly in the countryside. The air is sweet, birds are singing and a colony of egrets can be observed searching for worms in the freshly tilled earth. At this time of year the fields are covered with dark green alfalfa. A few mud-brick and straw sheds stand here and there, half hidden among long blades of wild grass in which insects are buzzing vigourously.

Al-Qursaya (The Pellet) is one of the many small islands which dot the course of the Nile in Cairo, and which appeared for the first time in the seventh century AD, when the river was still in the process of slowly changing its course westward. Al-Qursaya (known then as Ya'qoub's Island), only acquired its current shape and dimensions recently, after the High Dam had controlled the annual floods. "In the olden days," says Mohamed, a peasant who has a small plot of land, "the island used to disappear during the flood and pop up again when the waters were at their lowest. It was a sort of mound then, resembling a *kahk*. My grandfather and other peasants from Giza used to come here, smooth over the silt left by the receding flows, till the land and plant it. One year, the waters did not rise high enough to cover the island. On the contrary, the portion of land which remained above seemed larger, as if a hill had been slowly growing out of the Nile. This is when my family and several others from Giza joined the fishermen who had already erected sheds on the muddy slopes and settled on the island. I was born here, and so were my brothers and sisters."

When the waters receded permanently, uncovering a generous stretch of land, the peasants set to work levelling the silt. Year after year, they planted their crops. Finally they managed to reclaim several hundred feddans, which they distributed according to their means. At present, only one large plot belongs to a single landowner. The rest of the land is fragmented into tiny parcels, one for each family. A small *ezba* of mud brick houses eventually sprouted. It is now home to 1,200 people, mainly families of fishermen and peasants who moved from nearby villages as these lost their agricultural land to the encroaching urban sprawl.

On this particular Friday, the idyllic peace of the island has been shattered: its population is in turmoil. Rumours are flying: an influential foreign investor, the villagers say, has set his sights on the island and is to build a "touristic" project on 100,000 square metres. The community is talking of nothing else. *Amm* Galal is keeping an eye on business, nevertheless. Today is his day of rest; his son is rowing the boat back and forth, from the island to the shore, for him. Crouched on a rickety bench, the old man stops those coming and going to whisper a few words about "the people from the Ministry of Social Affairs who were asking questions."

Young and old men come in small groups to discuss the situation with artist Mohamed Abla who, like most of them, owns a shed (which he, unlike them, uses as a studio) and a small plot of land. Abla has promised to stand up for their rights. A stout woman, carrying a load of dry wood on her head, stops and observes the gathering. "Did you hear anything, *ya bey*?" she finally asks Abla, who tries to reassure her.

The woman moves on. Peasants and fishermen alike are worried. The inhabitants of the island don't deny that the land on which they originally settled belonged to the government; but where, on the Nile banks, is the situation any different? Besides, they reclaimed the land themselves; very literally, they made the island. Anyway, all this took place ages ago, during the time of their grandfathers.

The owners of plant nurseries along the shore obtained their land in exactly the same manner, but they have received the title to their plots, because they have been there for so long. So have the inhabitants of Al-Qursaya: what is the difference? Isn't this agricultural land, on which they were forbidden to build even the smallest shed by the law passed in 1986? If it is possible to build a large tourist development, how come they have been denied permission to carry out repairs to their houses, many of which were damaged by the earthquake? They have been accused of polluting the Nile, but would a five-star hotel be environmentally friendly?

There are also more anxious questions: where will they go now? Where will they find land again? This is fine land, on which their fathers and grandfathers toiled. Will they be given a piece of the desert instead? "The government has promised to find us lodgings, but who knows how far from our place of work they will be..." a young man reflects, twisting the end of his *galabiya* in nervous fingers. "They are taking your land as well, you will no longer have a place to work," an older man answers bitterly.

Ahmed sighs. He had plans of marrying in the spring, but it is all up in the air now. He works at the tanneries in Sayeda Zeinab. There are three sons in his family and their plot is small. His two younger brothers look after the land while he works in a factory to make ends meet. "Here, I can leave my mother all day long while I am gone. I know she is safe. She knows everybody. She is old and not in good health. She has never been confined indoors. She will have problems adjusting to a new environment."

Each one has a story, good reasons why he would not want to be forced to accept the government's offer if and when it comes. But all the peasants and fishermen say the same thing: when you have lived outdoors all your life, it is suffocating to be trapped between four walls. They have not asked for government assistance, they insist: they have the land and the Nile, their crops and fish.

At the doctor's house, the same arguments are reexamined and discussed all over again. The doctor was born on the island; so were his sons. His medical practice is in a small town in the Delta and he commutes every day, because he enjoys the peace and quiet of his home. He and his wife also breed Arabian horses; their registration papers for the land are in order. "We never asked for anything," he emphasises. "They gave us neither drinking water nor electricity or telephone lines. The inhabitants of the island put their resources together and paid all the expenses. There is no infrastructure whatsoever. We did not mind. We dug wells and brought drinking water from Mounib. We installed septic tanks. We struggled to get this place together and now they want to give us a room in Mit Oqba. Should I put my mare and her foal on the balcony? The profits I make from horse breeding I put back in the land. How can they compensate a man for his life's labour? Can anyone evaluate this in pounds and piastres?"

Al-Qursaya, in fact, is a perfect case study of spontaneous community participation. "Furthermore," says renowned columnist and head of the Society for Writers on the Environment, Salama Ahmed Salama, "the islands in the Nile are about the only green areas left in our cement jungle." It is ironic, he adds, that, having witnessed the mistakes of the West and of certain Asian countries, which are paying dearly today for the flurry of urbanisation that took place in their capitals at the beginning of this century, we are going ahead and committing the same errors. As all these countries backtrack on their rush to urban development and industrialisation, establishing parks and gardens in the middle of the cities, by the middle of next century, future generations of Egyptian citizens may be pulling down much of what we erected so recklessly.

In a telephone conversation, Giza Governor Maher El-Guindi minimised the imminence and consequences of the future development of the island: "We did receive an offer from a foreign investor for the purchase of 100,000 square metres on which a tourist complex could be established in the future. We are considering it, but nothing has been decided yet," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. Asked what would happen to the present population of the island if the deal goes through, he pointed out that the government was aware of the human dimension of the case and would give it due consideration if and when the project receives the go-ahead.

For the moment, then, Al-Qursaya, its lush alfalfa fields drenched by the mild winter sun, hangs suspended between a precarious past and an uncertain future.



Why?

For a long time, I imagined that everyone saw life in black and white, cause and effect, good or bad, one following the other in a neat sequence. I did, and never had cause to consider myself odd. It all goes back to traditional upbringing, the application of strict moral codes and being good at maths, maybe. In my ripe old age, I still rebel against the mysterious, the unexplained. Not knowing "how it happened" sends me into blind rages, as does the fact that so many people refuse to confess to their acts, leaving a most distasteful aura of uncertainty floating around simple events. Life, to be satisfactory, should be like a chain, the links neatly hooked one onto the other. Objects and people that function according to an obvious logic give me immense pleasure. If there are quirks in their making, I expect these to be predictable at least. I don't consider reliability — in objects or people — a boring trait, lacking in fantasy. I find it reassuring.

There has never been anything in my entire life as comforting as a simple "why?" followed by a waterproof answer. "I broke the cup", "I attacked him because I hate him", have a wholesome, pleasantly no-nonsense ring to them, even if the cup is Wedgewood, or the victim one's own brother. One at least knows what the score is.

Under the circumstances, I have had a particularly hard time adjusting to ordinary daily life and, for some reason, it seems to be getting worse: it could be that my field of vision is getting narrower, or that younger generations have not been subjected to the same brand of logic from infancy, and are therefore comfortable with lesser degrees of accuracy. Many housewives I know are content to be told that the cup "was broken" or that their best silk shirt "is lost". Personally I want more information, like when and how the cup broke, exactly, and in whose hands it was at the time of the accident. I insist to be told the whereabouts of the shirt just before its mysterious disappearance, and the identity of any witnesses to the vanishing. My friends wonder aloud why I did not seek a career in the secret service, while my maids leave me in utter disgust. Instead of punishing them by withholding their salary, as a normal employer would, I hunt them down with questions. I am ready to forgive, I tell them, provided they come out with the truth in its most minute details.

During Ramadan, the state of the traffic was such that I knew I would not be able to drive around and remain civil. I have an unfortunately sharp tongue in times of stress. Every year, I am warned that the foul language I use while on the road is unladylike in the best of circumstances, but sounds particularly offensive to fasting people, even those who are terminally endangering my life —and their own — with their reckless driving. To spare myself and others, I decided to travel in taxis during that period.

Crossing the Sixth of October Bridge in a particularly rickety vehicle one morning at the beginning of the holy month, I was preparing myself to spend a good half hour in bumper-to-bumper communion with other motorists, getting a lungful of befouled air without the benefit of a good smoke, when the vehicle I was daydreaming in was unceremoniously, and literally, hauled out of the way by a large red bus. Having mounted the footpath precipitously, my driver had no room left for manoeuvring. He just sat there shaking his head and asking for God's forgiveness.

"Why don't you go and hit him?" I asked politely. "He probably damaged your car." I got little reaction from the man, who simply shook his head and informed me that these things were expected in Ramadan. "Why?" I asked again. "It is our tradition," he said rather impatiently. "Are you a tourist?" I felt like one. To this day, I have never managed to fathom why there are twice as many cars on the road during the holy month, and why their drivers all drive as if they were under the influence. Where do all these people come from? Where are they going? Do they drive to work, then reverse and go back home?

My taxi driver never opened his mouth to answer the questions I was firing at him. Every now and then, he simply sighed and asked for God's forgiveness. After a while, he advised me to take another taxi if I was in a hurry. We were gridlocked on the bridge and there was no way I could do as told, so I ignored the impertinence. Somehow, defying logic, he finally managed to find enough space to back up his car and get off the footpath, a feat he accomplished with the kind of clatter normally heard in kitchens where violent domestic battles are taking place. A few minutes later, the line of cars started moving.

When we finally reached my destination, I realised that a trip that usually took under fifteen minutes had taken us an hour and a half. I paid the driver in consequence. He insisted on giving me the change, only charging the normal fee. "I want to pay for the extra time," I insisted. "It is not your responsibility," he said. "This is expected in Ramadan. How come you speak Arabic if you are a tourist?"

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Beef strips and spaghetti

Ingredients:
1 packet of spaghetti
1 kg. beef fillets (cut in strips)
2 onions (cut in wedges)
1/2kg. fresh button mushrooms (sliced)
1 carrot (grated)
300mll fresh cream
2 tbsp. Soy sauce
Butter + oil
Salt + pepper + allspice + cinnamon

Method:
Cook the spaghetti the usual way and add some butter. Season and, in the meantime, in another pan, heat some butter and oil. Add the fillet strips and stir until the beef is seared, over high heat. Add the onions and stir until they become tender. Add the soy sauce and spices. Stir again. Add the carrot then the mushrooms and some hot water (if needed). Add the cream. Stir and leave to cook only for five more minutes.

Serve with spaghetti, sautéed vegetables and a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Pretty in pink

Andrew Steele camps it up

There is something indisputably camp about certain shades of pink. Shades that scream glam and glitz are in evidence at the Café Saint Germain in the Méridien Heliopolis. The waiting staff are bedecked in pale pink shirts and blouses, bow ties and waistcoats a particularly virulent old rose. Why, the maître d' even boasted a salmon pink evening jacket. One half expected Shirley Bassey to come flouncing out of the kitchen.

The surroundings are dour enough, the St Germain being the generic restaurant outlet of the hotel. No-frills furnishings (in pink) and uninspiring decor, we expecting our supper menu to embody the sort of bland and tired foodstuffs that five-star hotel dining often comes up trumps with.

But something was nagging me. What could it be? I wondered: I wasn't dining with my mother-in-law. Then it hit me. I used to come here regularly for lunch, and it was really very good. As menus were proffered and eyes were cast it increasingly began to look like standards had not dropped. Indeed, if the food were as good as it sounded, then we were in for a treat. In the pink, in fact.

We both designed to begin with a classic *gratinée lyonnaise*. The French know what to do with an onion and a lump of cheese, and we were not disappointed. A suitably soupy liquor, neither too thick nor too thin, chock-full of shiny onions and sticky cheese. It was most savoury and toothsome and was warm and hearty enough to flush my companion's cheeks — pink, naturally.

The main courses were equally sumptuous. My vegetarian comrade was charmed by the choice of meat-free plates and plumped for the exotic-sounding *palet de légumes coulis de tomate et câpres*. The veg-packed potato cakes that ensued were breaded and lightly fried and came sitting on a lovely fresh coulis of tomatoes that were certainly plum. I'm fond of a gamey dish, and plumped for the *magret de canard aux deux baies*. Quack, and indeed, quack. It came sliced with its fat and was moist and pinky brown: the flesh melted on the palate and peppercorn sauce (pink peppercorns, of course) was a perfect partner to this ripe fowl. Perfectly sculpted steamed vegetables accompanied.

All in all a fine and fancy supper, and certainly well above par. The dubious standards maintained by a deal of five-star outlets in the capital are shown up for what they are when compared to this. Perhaps it is the out-and-out Frenchness of the Méridien that pervades, imbuing the food with a certain haute cuisine sort of quality. Perhaps it was just all that pink.

On the drinks front, the orange juices were so freshly squeezed one could smell them coming, and the espressos, naturally, were superb. If you happen to be passing, drop in for lunch or supper. The menu is wide and wonderful and caters to snack seekers and gourmands alike. Prices range from frugal to gratuitously expensive, and the service is impeccable. Altogether a panopoly of pleasure, and at LE125 for a slicker than slick supper where everything was well done, who can complain. A word of warning though: choose your frocks carefully, or heavens, will you clash.

Café Saint Germain at Le Méridien Heliopolis, 51, Al-Orouba Street (Airport Road), Heliopolis Telephone: 2912561

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Musical instrument (4)
5. Pin for an oar (5)
10. Flat bottomed snub-nosed fishing vessel (4)
14. Wild ox of Celebes; dwarf buffalo (4)
15. ...Buena = island in San Francisco (5)
16. Abnormal sound in lungs caused by congestion (4)
17. Township (4)
18. Obtuse; ill-bred; stupid (5)
19. Malevolent (4)
20. Bull-ring cheer (3)
21. Join forces; water pocket (4)
22. Throng; overrun in troublesome manner (6)
24. Relinquishment; surrender (7)
26. Dutch knife (4)
27. Traveler's rest house (3)
28. Sharply outlined, hyph. wds (8)
32. Be grateful (5)
35. Blare; detonation (5)
36. One, Fr. (3)
37. Skating arena (4)
38. Constraints; kidneys (5)
39. Outer seed cover (4)
40. Crumbs (3)
41. Canonized person (5)
42. Again (5)
43. Odontiasis; dentition (8)
45. Mongrel (3)
46. Type of jury (4)
47. Antibacterial substance used to treat leprosy (7)
51. Assignment; chore (6)
54. Traditional knowledge (4)
55. Thwack (3)
56. Keats or Blake (4)
57. Jocular (5)
59. Homo sapiens; cover ground (4)
60. Pertaining to the ear (4)
61. Sheep like (5)
62. French auxiliary verb (4)
63. Obi (4)
64. Cycle; foot lever (5)
65. Remunerations (4)

DOWN
1. Rack and ruin; devastation (5)
2. Old womanish (5)
3. Portrayals (5)
4. Crony; play mate (3)
5. Magnate; shogun of Japan (6)
6. Wading bird (5)
7. Said (4)
8. Short for pounds (3)
9. Facility; casualness (8)
10. Favour; take a fancy to (6)
11. Be delirious (4)
12. Clay and McGraw (4)
13. Dissolve; liquefy (4)
21. Colour between crimson and purple; pierce (4)
23. Orderly (4)
25. Hit bottom; capsize (4)
26. Cant (5)
28. Adhere to; tinkle (5)
29. Concise; ungracious (4)
30. Group of persons regarded as an entity (4)
31. Comb. for form "far", var. (4)
32. Gait of some quadrupeds (4)
33. Retain; sign on (4)
34. Poker stake (4)
35. Existence (5)
38. Drizzle (8)
39. Affectations (4)
41. Steer clear of (4)
42. Pawn; minion; throw dust in the eyes of (4)
44. Rushes and straws used to cover roofs (6)
45. OPEC is one (6)
47. Spanish title (5)
48. Emulate Demosthenes (5)
49. Mother-of-pearl (5)
50. Dueling necessity, pl. (5)
51. Epic poetry (4)
52. Roster, ecclesiastic tribunal in Rome (4)
53. Portuguese money (4)
54. Deposited (4)
58. Contraction for "I have" (3)
59. Ump's substitute (3)

Last week's solution

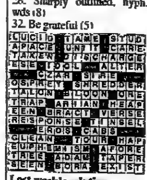



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Is more stringent security the answer to the problem of Islamist violence? Or is prevention the best cure? Six years after the government launched its initiative to upgrade "informal" areas, **Fatemah Farag** revisits some of Cairo's shantytowns, including Imbaba, a former byword for Islamist militancy

Loosening the poverty belt

In the market of Ezbet El-Mufti, amidst the hustle and bustle, the buying and selling, it is difficult to believe this was once a major centre of militant Islamist power. It is just as hard to believe that this is an area in which millions of pounds have been spent on "upgrading". Garbage is heaped everywhere, the narrow streets are full of holes, everyone complains of how difficult it is to make a living.

Since 1993, the government has launched an intensive campaign to provide basic services to these areas: every week, the local press is full of news items on funds allocated to various upgrading projects. A December 1997 report prepared by the Cairo Governorate, for example, notes that 68 shanty areas were identified for upgrading and a total of LE182,700 allocated between 1993 and 1995, while 13 areas, covering an area of 436,621 square metres and inhabited by about 110,000 people, were targeted for total demolition.

The mass of two- to three-storey raw-brick houses, mud hovels, or tin and cardboard structures which put a roof over the heads of the poor are divided by urban planners into two categories: slums and squats, lumped together in Arabic under the term *ashwa'iyat*. The first is characterised simply by poverty (the inhabitants have legal deeds to prove ownership), while the second is the result of an "illegal" — or de facto — take-over of government property. Both, however, are informal housing and lack basic services such as sewage and running water. "Informal" areas are characterised by high population density, unpaved roads, and the absence of schools or health facilities.

"About four years ago we had no facilities whatsoever," said Mahmoud Murgan, head of the National Democratic Party (NDP) office and member of the Local Council of the Giza Governorate representing Ezbet El-Mufti, which witnessed some of the worst battles between the government and Islamist militants in 1992. Today, hospitals and schools are under construction, but, until they open, people still have to walk three to four kilometres to get to the nearest hospital, government office, or school.

The woes of poverty are seen not only in the squalour which marks people's everyday lives, but in disease, the high illiteracy rates and child labour. According to the *Al-Ahram Strategic Report for 1995*, 71 per cent of the children in Mounira El-Gharbiya in Imbaba have never been to school, and enter the labour market at an early age.

The exact number of people living in shanty housing is hard to determine. According to the 1986 government census, 673,517 families lived in one room each in shanty areas, while the latest figures provided by the 1997 census show that shantytowns house 17 per cent of the total population. Independent statistics, however, put the figure as high as 40 per cent in Giza and Cairo. Milad Hanna, an urban planning specialist and the author of many books on the housing problem in Egypt, explained that the difference is due to the different definitions of shanty housing, which often vary from one administration to another. "No one really knows [the real figure] exactly... However, what is clear is that the numbers are very large, and that Cairo is almost totally surrounded by a chain of slums," said Hanna.

Hanna was one of the first to attempt to highlight the problem of shantytowns and the political tinderboxes they can be. "Even though I wrote about the connection between slums and extremism in the mid-'80s, the government did not pay attention until it found that, in effect, the Central Security Forces could not get into Imbaba... Then they decided to allocate great sums of money to these areas."

Until 1992 the government had considered the shantytowns illegal housing and, therefore, authorities were unwilling to extend facilities such as water, sewage and electricity. The confrontation in Imbaba mentioned by Hanna — no fewer than 150,000 policemen imposed a three-week siege to shake the militants' hold on the area — highlighted the extent to which miserable living conditions had embittered and angered the disenfranchised shantytown dwellers: fertile soil for extremism.

The government's inability to provide adequate housing and services, as well as the political vacuum left by political parties within these areas, gave ample space in which militant Islamist groups could work and recruit members. "The *gama'at* [Islamist groups] provided a lot of services for people," acquiesced Ahmed 'Karate', a former group member: "things like protection and jobs, sometimes medicine or health care... then, when they ask people to join them to spread the word of God, of course people join."

Nader Fergany, director of the Al-Mishkat Centre, an independent research organisation, commented, "When there is an increase in poverty and unemployment and at the same time the vast majority of the poor have no way to voice their interests, this is the starting point of the link between poverty and social conflict, which some people call 'terrorism'."

The social composition of militant groups backs up this argument. According to security statistics, the majority of members in Cairo and Giza came from shanty areas: 31 per cent from Imbaba, 24.2 per cent from El-Sahel, 14 per cent from El-Sharabia, 9.1 per cent from El-Wayli and 7.3 per cent from El-Matariya. *Furthermore, the chaotic layout of these* areas provided convenient hiding and training areas for the recruits.

The main reason behind the proliferation of the "informal" areas is the increase in rural-urban migration which began in the 1960s. At the time, large industrial projects were being established in urban centres, while rural areas began to witness increased poverty. Hanna noted that "in the mid-'70s, housing economics changed. The price of land increased 100 to 200 times and the cost of construction, 20 to 40 times. This meant that building low-cost housing became very difficult and rents increased to the point that they exceeded the capabilities of the poorer strata in society."

The lack of a comprehensive urban planning vision was also identified by the First Conference on Urban Planning, held in Cairo in 1994, as a major factor behind the extensive slum areas. The great increase in population was not accompanied by the necessary increase in the area of land designated for housing.

These chilling facts are reflected in the statistics of the World Bank's 1995 report on the Construction Industry in Egypt, which states that 80 per cent of housing built between 1966 to 1986 was shanty housing. The *Al-Ahram Strategic Report for 1995* indicates that 84 per cent of total construction in the 1980s was informal housing.

To address the problem, the first item on the government agenda was to create a database to facilitate needs assessment. The *Information Centre at the Council of Ministers*, in co-ordination with 11 governorates and the Ministry of Local Administration, worked toward this goal. Information documenting 434 shanty areas as well as the services lacking in every area was collected. It was estimated that LE3.5 billion would be needed to upgrade the basic services of these areas: roads, sewage systems, electricity, running water and garbage collection. As for housing, education and health facilities, the task force decided that these be the responsibility of the relevant ministries.

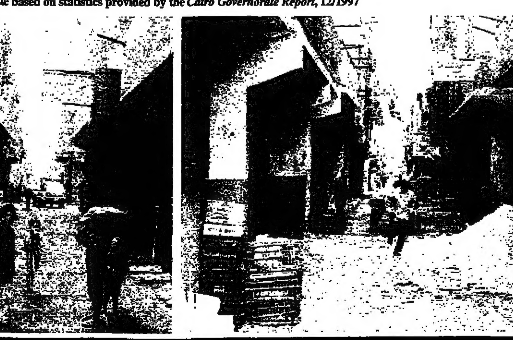
More than seven million people were targeted. By the end of the fiscal year 1994, a total amount of LE655.7 million was allotted to the upgrading project for the 11 governorates, while LE92.2 million, in addition to LE1.8 million for cleaning facilities, were allotted for 1995-96.

It is, again, difficult to find precise figures on the implementation of these plans. Hanna points out that, although some areas were slightly improved, the vast majority remained as they were (see chart for details of the Cairo Governorate's plan). He also noted that the dissolution of the Local Administration Ministry, which left the whole issue of shanty upgrading to the authority of the governorates under the direction of the prime minister, has left the project without any clear leadership or central planning.

Sectors and amounts spent on upgrading in Cairo

Sector	No. of areas upgraded	No. of areas presently undergoing upgrading	Areas still to be targeted for upgrading	Amounts of money needed to be spent between 1997 - 2002 (in million LE)
Sewage	12	9	37	260
Running water	4	31	33	180
Paving roads	-	30	38	283
Electricity	4	51	13	30

Table based on statistics provided by the *Cairo Governorate Report*, 12/1997



In Imbaba, people agree that there have been some changes, but not enough and not necessarily what was needed. "It is true that the place has been upgraded," said *Hagg* Ali, a juice shop owner on the main market street in Ezbet El-Mufti. "Seven years ago it was really dangerous here and a woman could not walk on her own after dark. Today, there are policemen and it is safer."

But others say that the police presence has not benefited the people of the area. "On our streets you will find drug dealers and thugs, and the police do not seem concerned with these," complained Maurice Hanna, a grocer on the same street. As he spoke, a commotion started at the other end of the road as a governorate truck took vendors off the streets among screams of "the governorate is coming, watch out." It seems that not all forms of government intervention are deemed positive.

Furthermore, basic needs have not yet been addressed adequately by the government. "I would like to have drains and water in my house," said a fish vendor who sends her daughter on a half-hour walk every day to the nearest water pump to get the family's requirements. "I would like better transportation," said Khadiga Ali, who sells vegetables in the market of Ezbet El-Mufti, while Maurice Hanna puts garbage collection and accessible medical facilities at the top of his priority list.

At a meeting in Imbaba in late December, Governor of Giza Maher El-Guindi announced that LE800 million had been spent on the development of 32 shanty areas in Giza, and that LE258 million would be spent in the next five years to complete the upgrading programme.

The visible signs of upgrading in Imbaba and other areas such as Manshiyet Nasr and El-Deweika are the recent paving of main roads and the erection of lamp-posts. Such changes were government priorities, in part because they facilitate police entry into the areas. Walking down mud roads full of holes in Ezbet El-Mufti, or next to open sewers in El-Deweika, however, it is easy to understand why change is seen by some critics as merely superficial.

"My life is really difficult, and always has been," said Khadiga Ali. She comes here every day from El-Saff, a nearby shanty area, with her two eldest sons, leaving her two other children with neighbours and her unemployed husband. "I buy the vegetables and carry them here. It takes me about two hours each way and then I have to pay 50 piastres to the officers so that they do not seize my goods. I usually make around four pounds per day," she explained. She lives in one room and shares a common area, which has running water for cooking, with other families. She has taken her eldest son out of school; the rest will not attend. "It was too expensive. It cost LE35 a year," she said, glancing at her son, who was sitting near a rubbish pile.

A nearby fish vendor complained that people can no longer afford to buy meat, fish or chicken. "I sell some for LE2 per kilo and some for LE4 and most people cannot afford to pay the whole sum all at once and so I take my money in instalments," she explained.

Those who are not as poor as Khadiga are not much better off. "The average government clerk who lives in our area makes about LE125 and most craftsmen cannot find jobs because the market is slow. It is true. We have a lot of unemployment," explained the NDP's Murgan.

Further, Hanna highlighted that the middle class which used to live in "suitable" neighbourhoods can now establish new families only in informal areas. "When the middle class starts to live in shantytowns, then there is a very serious social imbalance," warned Hanna.

According to Murgan, many of the changes Ezbet El-Mufti has witnessed have actually been the result of the arrival of large families. "My father saw that there was no school in the area a few years ago, so we took the initiative of building a school and handing it over to the ministry. I was involved in getting a hearse for the area and putting a roof on our mosque. People needed a social service centre so we prepared the ground and gave it to the government to build the centre... The government accepts all our requests."

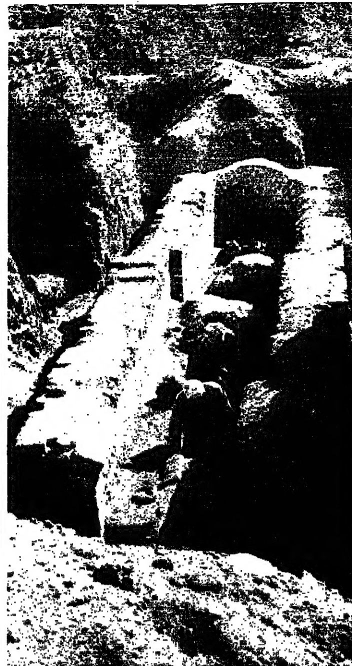
To fill in the gap, there have been several suggestions. Hanna has prescribed the emulation of an existing project. "For three years, the Shorouq project has worked to upgrade poor villages through coordination with NGOs. I have suggested a similar plan for urban slum areas, in which the inhabitants themselves would be involved in the development process," Hanna explained. The only solution to the housing problem in general is subsidised housing, he added. As head of the Housing Committee in parliament in 1985 Hanna had proposed that taxes be collected from high-income home-owners to subsidise such a plan.

The militant connection has also inspired a "militant rehabilitation" programme by the Ibn Khaldun Centre, an independent research body. The project aims at helping re-integrate former militants into society by giving them loans to start micro-enterprises. Ahmed 'Karate', the former militant, is one beneficiary. "I think that many people can make use of such loans. I started off with a LE1,000 loan and now I have eight people working under me," he recounted, outside his sandwich stand in Imbaba. Fergany, however, points out the business environment is hostile to micro-enterprises and that the effectiveness of such a programme depends on a comprehensive plan. "This method requires training and re-training and must be heavily supported because there is a high rate of failure. If it is carried out in isolation of a framework it cannot be effective," he explained.

Some Islamic associations continue to offer a helping hand to the inhabitants of the shanty areas. In Imbaba, El-Gam'iya El-Shar'iya, an association registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, offers education and health services.

There is a limit to what individual initiatives can achieve, however, and hence the gap between people's needs and the government programme to upgrade shanty areas remains wide. Bedeir El-Mirsawi, the head of the Cairo Governorate planning unit, explains: "We are working with available funds. Whatever is not yet in place will be by the end of our next five-year plan."









Beneath Nile silt deposits evidence of a vast urban site is coming to light near Mansoura, including ovens for pottery and glass manufacture

photos: Samir Naoum

Digging for treasure and knowledge

Probes undertaken at an ancient Delta site have yielded large circular ovens for making glass and pottery — and much more, as **Samir Naoum** *reports*

A mere 25 years ago, the Delta was believed to have no archaeological sites worthy of attention, all having been obscured forever by Nile silt deposits. Now, excavations are revealing the wealth and significance of just one site, which are little short of astounding.

Archaeological probes at the site of the ruins of ancient Thmuis (Tomai Al-Amdid), south of Mansoura, have unearthed, among other objects, a large number of ovens which were used for manufacturing glass and pottery in Ptolemaic times.

"Glass was then a flourishing industry because it was used in ornaments in place of semi-precious stones," said Sami Eid, who has been conducting excavations in the area since 1994. "The glass industry had reached such a level of perfection in Egypt that archaeologists studying Tutankhamun's treasures mistook it for lapis lazuli and red agate."

Although volcanic glass and rock crystal were widely used from pre-dynastic times, "the manufacture of blown glass was only introduced into Egypt by the Syrians in the first century, at which time Alexandria was the heart of the industry," said Eid.

Apart from the ovens, the site yielded a large collection of coins. "After lengthy scrubbing of the deposits, we found them to be silver coins," said Eid. "Two of the most important pieces bore the names of the Emperor Trajan while one of the bronze coins had the name of Augustus. All bore effigies of the emperors on one side and drawings of sacred animals, Roman deities, and ears of corn [possibly signifying Egypt as the granary of the Roman Empire] on the other."

A statue of a winged child, which may be a representation of cupid, a statue of Venus, the Greek goddess of beauty depicted naked with a broken arm and leg, and a terra-cotta seated statue of the Egyptian goddess Hathor with the sun disc between her horns, complete the discoveries thus far.

Tomai Al-Amdid (Thmuis), along with Tel Al-Rob (Mendes), constituted the capital of an important province in the Delta. "One of the seven ancient branches of the Nile flowed between them," explained Mohamed Abdel-Fattah, director of antiquities in the south Daqahliya province in the Delta. "It was a site that gained importance when Nektanebo, the last Egyptian king, chose it as his military headquarters in his wars against the Persians," Abdel-Fattah went on. "The Egyptian army camped in the city and moved on to confront the enemy in a battle, in which the Egyptians were defeated."

Later, in Ptolemaic times, houses were built around military estates. "All house owners were obliged to provide lodgings for the soldiers," explained Abdel-Fattah, "and the decree certainly caused friction between the home owners and estate lords. Eventually, home owners who worked for the royal treasury, Greeks enlisting in the army, and priests were exempted from the obligation of providing lodgings."

Under Roman rule, Thmuis proved to be an ideal location for Roman military campaigns against Palestine. "The importance of the city during this period is apparent from the discovery of mosaic flooring in houses. These magnificent mosaics may now be seen in the Graeco-Roman Museum in Alexandria," said Abdel-Fattah, adding that the city continued to flourish in the Christian period, when it was the seat of the patriarch, "and a centre for ecclesiastical activity." A small well, with seven steps leading down to water level, was discovered in this context.

Archaeological activity in the Delta is a priority under Gaballa Ali Gaballa, the new chairman of the Supreme Council of Antiquities. If this site near Mansoura is an example of the wealth of objects and historical significance of the sites in Lower Egypt, the new venture is extremely encouraging.

Excavations continue at Tomai Al-Amdid, and the significance of the site is currently being discussed. It is now thought that the circular ovens for making pottery and glassware may actually be linked to an industrial area located to the east, which still awaits the pick and shovel of excavators.

Rehabilitation of a pharaoh

The reign of Rajedef has long been shrouded in mystery. **Janine Kharma** reports on the new findings of a Swiss archaeological team working at Abu Rawash

History has made Rajedef into a usurper, damned by his father Khufu, builder of the Great Pyramid, and probably assassinated by his half-brother Khafre, his father's favourite son. Rajedef's pyramid at Abu Rawish, north of Giza, was believed to have been unfinished, and all that remains of him is a magnificent head belonging to one of the first-known examples of a royal sphinx, on display in the Louvre in Paris.

Now, recent discoveries by Professor Michel Valloggia and his mission have partly lifted the veil on this Fourth Dynasty king, long relegated by history to the shadow of the great builders of the Giza Plateau.

According to the new finds, the pyramid was, in fact, finished. Originally it was slightly higher than that of Menkaure, builder of the third and smallest pyramid of Giza, and had a limestone facing on a base of pink granite. The discovery of a block with the date "year 1" of his reign, and another inscription mentioning the "year 23" bear witness to the longevity of his reign. Also, the analysis of fragments of statues — which led to the earlier conclusion that a deliberate attempt was made to erase the name of the king from this world and in the afterlife — revealed that the statues were actually destroyed in Roman times when a fort was erected on the site for the strategic purpose of watching over the caravan routes approaching the valley.

More than 40,000 miniature vessels were found by the team member Sylvie Marchand, who described them as designed to serve the cult of the deceased over a long period of time. "In fact, the cult may have been maintained at the site until the end of the Old Kingdom," said Valloggia, adding that these new discoveries are likely to lead to a rewriting of the history of the period.

Sentinel of the desert, swept by winds, the hill of Abu Rawash dominates the valley from the top of its 150-metre-high location. It is on this strategic crossroads that the eldest son of Khufu, Rajedef, chose to erect his *house of eternity*. Easily accessible from the valley, but not a part of the regular tourist circuit despite its close proximity to Giza, the pyramid has served as a quarry since Roman times.

Today, all that remains of its monumental structure, originally more than 67 metres high, is a 12-metre-high base. Because of its location in a military zone, the site has not been excavated since 1901.

Full house everywhere

Tens of thousands of Egyptians were touring the country these past two weeks. **Sherine Nasr** *reports on an unusual holiday season*

"It's a long vacation, the weather is great and the prices could not be better. This is the time to go on our long-dreamed of vacation." The comments, by Soheir Habib, an accountant, just about sum up the situation. Prices are indeed low: the weather is, in fact, great: children are on their mid-year holidays: and the general feeling is "it's now or maybe never!"

Egypt is experiencing a virtual internal exodus, with estimates at around 36,000 people going off for a vacation inside the country. "The big discounts offered by hotels and tourist villages have not only helped a greater number of Egyptians enjoy a vacation at home that they would not normally be able to afford. It has also created a much needed boom in domestic travel," said Mohamed Lahita of Emeco Travel.

Tourist companies and hotels started making preparations two months before the mid-year holidays and, according to Youssef Nazmi, public relations manager at Misr Travel, "all our packages were sold out a month before the vacation started. In fact, we had 100 per cent occupancy in our Red Sea resorts."

In an attempt to attract the largest number of holiday-makers, Misr Travel launched a programme entitled "Explore Your Homeland" which included visits to every tourist destination in the country, with the greatest variety of activities, and prices to meet every purse. "Forty different programmes were specially designed for Egyptians, including recreational trips, cultural tours and even vacations for religious and medical purposes to provide the widest selection possible," he said.

Four-day trips to Sharm El-Sheikh, full board at five-star hotels at an average cost of LE500 per person, have attracted thousands of Egyptians to South Sinai, Luxor and Aswan. One-day trips to nearer destinations are also an enormous success. "We organised trips to Wadi Natroun, Ismailia, the Qanater Barrages, Fayoum and other destinations for LE17, including transportation and a meal," Nazmi said. The deals have, in the words of a travel agent, "literally been gobbled up."

"A one-day trip appealed to me," said Ahmed Yehia, a secondary school student. "I wanted to make the most of my allowance so I decided to go to Fayoum during the first week of the vacation, and then on to Alexandria for two days just before the vacation ended," he added.

University students went for the longer trips. "We thought it was the best time to go to youth hostels. There is one in every city and new ones have recently opened in Hurghada," said Mamdouh Abdel-Moneim, an art student at Cairo University.

"The experience was great," said Abdel-Moneim. "Together with four of my colleagues we enjoyed three days in Hurghada. Each of us paid less than LE100," he said.

Deep-sea diving centres, too, offered special prices, an attraction even to those without any experience in the sport. "Because most of us in the group did not know how to dive, the centre provided us with a trainer. It was a special experience, but the best thing about it was that it cost so little," he said.

The mid-year holiday is definitely a family-oriented time. Most tourist companies recognised this and reaped the rewards. "A wider sector of Egyptian families have now been able to go to places they would normally have never been able to visit," said Bahaa Mustafa, reservation manager at Luxor Mövenpick.

Mustafa underlined that hotels in Luxor provided 50 per cent discounts. So, a double room with breakfast cost LE198 instead of the usual LE400.

Peculiarly, in view of its recent troubles, Luxor was the most sought-after destination by many families. "The rooms were reserved a week before the holidays started," Mustafa said.

The boom was immediately felt by people like taxi drivers, restaurant owners and *felluca*, or boat, operators who were absolutely delighted by in-coming work after a long period of stagnation following the 17 November Luxor terrorist attack in which 58 foreigners were killed.

Prices offered for a Nile cruise have proved hard to resist. "They range from LE80 to LE180 for a double room, full board and some sightseeing," said Ossama Baghdadi, from Mena Tours.

"In an effort to cater for different categories, we provided the minimum charge. Extra services were offered at extra cost," he added.

"Many Egyptians showed great interest in visiting archaeological sites. We organised trips to the west bank in Luxor while other families showed interest in visiting Esna, Edfu and Kom Ombo by car. We helped with the arrangements," said Mustafa.

The two museums in Luxor, Luxor Museum and the Mummification Museum, proved very popular. Egyptians were extremely encouraged by the special low-entrance fees. "Even those who were not particularly interested in ancient history were motivated by the low prices. The ticket for the Mummification Museum, for example, was for LE2," he said.

"No fewer than 200,000 Egyptians went to the Qanater Barrages during the *Eid* last week," said Khaled Lutfi, from Morgana tourist village.

The 25 fully-equipped chalets were booked solid. "These are single and double air-conditioned chalets with a terrace overlooking the Nile," said Khaled. "Each has a grill for those who want to have their own barbecue, and they are fully booked for the entire three-week vacation."

Even car rental companies have seized the opportunity to offer something special. "We had a package for Egyptians with a 50 per cent discount. We were transporting people to Nuweiba, Taba, Dahab, Sharm El-Sheikh, Hurghada and Quseir," said Alaa Hafez, from Europe Car. "Our services are also appreciated because of often erratic flying schedules," he said.

As this story goes to press, Egyptians are either basking in the delights of places at home they have seen only in posters and on TV, or are starting a vacation countdown.

Wherever you go these days, you hear of holiday experiences and travel plans. The great thing, however, is the possibility that once Egyptians have sampled the country's attractions, historical and natural, they will develop a taste for Egypt, and domestic tourism will have been given the greatest boost ever.

For Egyptians to delight in their own country's resorts (apart from the traditional sites on the Mediterranean and the Canal cities) is a rarity. And there is little doubt that now that the momentum has picked up, it will continue.

Dawn of Progress

Last Saturday in the heart of darkness — or in the middle of nowhere, depending on your point of view — 16 countries from all across the continent gathered to dispute the 21st African Nations Soccer Cup. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** watched the light break

If Joseph Conrad was among the guests in Burkina Faso attending the 21st African Nations Cup, would he still insist on writing another *Heart of Darkness*? Or would he recognise his mistake, change the plot and name his next volume *Dawn of Progress*?!!

In their opening ceremony, the Burkinabe did their best to give a warm welcome to their African and international guests. In their celebrations, they sought to share their history with their guests and show them also how their country had changed down the ages. Burkina Faso, a little-known African nation, lies in the south-west of what the colonialists referred to as "the dark continent". The country was previously called Volta, and was a colony shared by Spain and France. When they gained their freedom in the 1960s they changed their name to Burkina Faso, which means "the land of the freemen".

Since 1996, when Burkina Faso was chosen to host the coming African Nations Cup, the country has been in the sporting limelight. Indeed, the arrival of this major international championship has been of great benefit to the young country, despite some drawbacks in their first-time organisation.

Eric Kusi Kossongona, Bobo-Dioulasso correspondent for the *Journal du Soir* newspaper in Ouagadougou, spoke last week of the great benefits for Bobo-Dioulasso of the arrival of the African Nations Cup. "A new stadium has been built for the matches. There have been hotels built, new roads constructed and the infrastructure has been improved throughout the whole of the 200,000-strong south-western city," said Kossongona. He continued: "Hosting this tournament has helped people at all levels in the city from a financial point of view, because business has been boosted in many areas: in tourism, construction and administration. But the people are also just very proud that Bobo-Dioulasso has had the chance to host this event and welcome people from all over Africa."

After the opening ceremony, all eyes were on the green fields of the pitches of Burkina Faso, in the hope of some exciting African football. But the opening match of one of the two most important championships on the continent was decidedly shaky. Groups A and C were the first to start, and their matches were largely unexciting. With one exception, we seemed all of a sudden to be back in the Dark Ages.

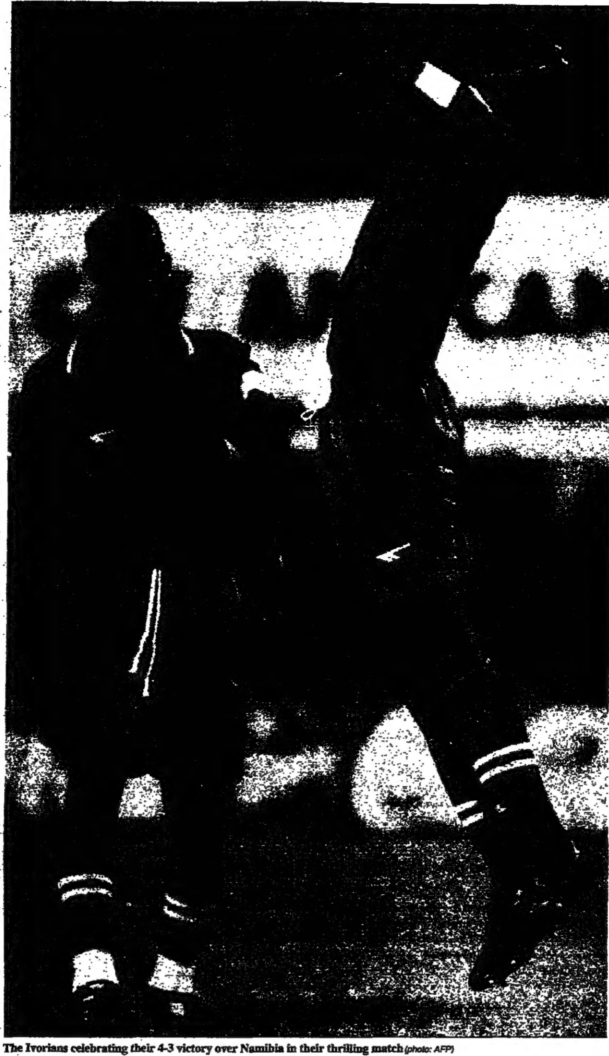
The opening match between Africa's World Cup representatives Cameroon and hosts Burkina Faso was only tenuously connected to skill and enjoyment, but ended successfully for Cameroon with a 1-0 victory, Alphonso Tchami scoring midway through the first half. Cameroon coach Jean Manga Onguene believed the high temperatures, sometimes reaching as much as 40 degrees in the shade, were a significant determining factor. Speaking perhaps a touch ironically, Onguene said, "Most of my players play in Europe where it's cold at the moment, and many of them really suffered in the heat." But he was satisfied with a victory over the host country. As a result, Burkina Faso will now have some difficulty qualifying for the quarter-finals, since they will probably have to beat Algeria late on Wednesday (after the *Weekly* has gone to press) to go through.

On the second day of the competition, the football was still generally unstable and a little boring. In Group A, Guinea beat Algeria 1-0 in a weak match. In Group C, Angola drew with title-holders South Africa in a very boring match, littered with fouls which brought four yellow cards and a red card for Angola and two yellow and one red for South Africa.

However, the second match in Group C was really thrilling. Midfielder Lassina Diabate scored with seven minutes left to give Ivory Coast a thrilling 4-3 victory over Namibia. The Elephants from West Africa appeared to be cruising at half-time when they led 3-0 through two goals from veteran striker and captain Joel Tirhi and one by Ibrahima Bakayoko. But débutantes Namibia reduced the arrears in the opening minute of the second half when Scottish-based striker Eliphas Shivute headed in a goal, and another two goals inside three minutes from Ricardo Mannetti and Shivute soon brought them level. Urged on by local fans in the capacity 35,000 crowd at the Omnisport Stadium, Namibia came close to scoring again before Diabate settled one of the most exciting matches in the 41-year history of the tournament. Namibian goalkeeper Fillemon Kanlelo got one hand to a powerful, swerving close-range shot by the 23-year-old Bordeaux midfielder, but could not prevent the ball flying into the net.

That was what we came for: strong, thrilling, unforgettable football. Victories like that of Côte d'Ivoire over Namibia are what fans, Africans and soccer brokers are all hoping for from the land of Burkina Faso: a shaft of light to clear away the surrounding darkness.

(The results of Monday and Tuesday's matches, including Egypt's first match of the tournament, can be found on the front page.)



The Ivorians celebrating their 4-3 victory over Namibia in their thrilling match *(photo: AFP)*

The year the dogs barked

Sixty a day may not do you much good if you're an Alsatian, but all the tar in Egypt couldn't hold underdogs Eastern Tobacco back when they made National Cup history by eliminating Zamalek in the second round. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** did some passive smoking

This year is the first time the round-robin system has been applied to the second round of the National Cup. It is also the first time that the second-best team in the land has been disqualified so early in the competition. Underdog teams, who have always lingered at the bottom of the league standings, had hoped the new system would give them a chance to prove themselves at last. Their wish was answered last Monday when Zamalek flunked out of the second round at the hands of mighty Eastern Tobacco. In the past, the first two rounds of the Cup were run on the knockout system, which gave the underdogs only one chance to qualify. But this year the system has swung in their favour, and the dogs have begun to bark.

The second round has been held over 10 days, with the 32 teams divided into eight groups of four teams each.

The two toughest pools were those which held the nation's two powerhouse teams, Ahli and Zamalek. Ahli had a better chance of qualifying from the eighth pool, where they faced only indubitably weak teams — Nasr City's Iskan, Minya, and Olympic of Alexandria — and they duly went through with nine points, followed by Olympic of Alexandria with three. But Zamalek were up against a tough contender, Arab Contractors, the dark horse of the league, who want to prove they are as good as their more illustrious rivals. Yet despite the obvious threat, it was not Osman's warriors who were responsible for Zamalek's disqualification, but rather those giants of the roll-your-own long ball game, Eastern Tobacco Company. Their victory was made all the sweeter by the fact that their coach is himself a high-tar-content former Zamalek player, Gamal Abdallah. No wonder Ruud Kroll's babies left the pitch coughing with shame. As a result, even if Arab Contractors didn't exactly light their group up, they still managed to qualify for the next round with five points, while Zamalek tied with Eastern Tobacco, who then went through on goal difference.

The best game in the tournament so far was Ahli's match against Olympic, whom they defeated 2-0 in an excellent vivid game. Both teams were determined to win, and the performance on both sides was superb, distinguished by a high technical standard. Ahmed El-Kass, who played two years for Zamalek only to return to Olympic, was the great white hope of his team, but one player cannot guarantee victory by himself. Although the Olympic players did everything they could to score, in their haste they wasted at least three opportunities that should have materialised into goals. Ahli controlled the first few minutes of the game, but as soon as they relaxed, Olympic grabbed the opportunity and almost went ahead. Shocked into action, Ahli launched a counter-attack led by Walid Salah. When Salah's attempt on goal failed, Sayed Abdel-Hafiz suddenly appeared from nowhere to score Ahli's first. Olympic retaliated by intensifying their attacks, while Ahli appeared to relax again, but the two substitutions made by Ahli at the beginning of the second half renewed their energy. More focused with Ali Maher and Osama Orabi in place of Mohamed Farouq and Magdi Tolba, their control on the match tightened. Ali Maher released a cannonball shot worthy of Stevie Watson in his prime, which the Olympic goalkeeper could only clear as far as the boot of Ibrahim Hassan. Hassan promptly planted it back in the net in the 28th minute of the second half, thus sealing Ahli's victory.

While Ahli were finding their form, Zamalek's scoreless draw against Eastern Tobacco showed them having seriously mislaid theirs. It is now widely expected that coach Ruud Kroll will resign after this unprecedented early disqualification.

Ismaili produced the top score of the week in their fifth pool match against Bassioun, whom they wiped out 5-0.

As for the other teams that have qualified for the next round, Port Fouad and Ittihad Alexandria are through from the third pool, while Suez was the first team to be disqualified, before even Zamalek.

From pool six, Misry go through after defeating Ghazl Suez 1-0. In pool four, although Ittihad Osman lost their game last week against Ghazl El-Mahalla, and the two teams are tied on points, Osman have qualified on goal difference. Meanwhile, the lucky team so far in pool one is Canal, who qualified after defeating Nabaroh 2-0.

Handball league heats up

The second handball super league tournament kicked off in Port Said, Cairo and Suez simultaneously yesterday. **Inas Mazhar** reports and evaluates first-round action in Aswan, Assiut and Tanta last weekend

Twelve teams are currently taking part in three super league tournaments in Port Said, Cairo and Suez. Ahli and Zamalek of Cairo and Olympic and Sporting of Alexandria are in the first group in Port Said. In Cairo, the second group includes Port Said, Tayaran, Shebine and Arab Contractors. The third group, in Suez, includes Tanta, Misri, Semouha and Gezira.

The premier league includes 12 teams divided into three groups. First-round games were played last weekend at three venues, also simultaneously. After three days of tough, heated and often thrilling competition, Ahli won the battle in Aswan. Olympic placed second, Zamalek third and Tayaran fourth. Sporting emerged number one in the second group played in Assiut, followed by Port Said, Arab Contractors and Semouha. Shebine headed group three games played in Tanta, followed by Misri, Gezira and Tanta.

According to the Egyptian Handball Federation's new regulations in the premier league, the winner of the Assiut group, Sporting, joins the top three teams of the first group, which are currently competing in Port Said. Shebine, winner of the third group and Tayaran, fourth in the first group, join Port Said and Arab Contractors in the second group in Cairo. Tanta, Misri, Semouha and Gezira compete in the third group in Suez.



Only six teams, the first two from each group, will go to the final stages. They will play a round-robin format that will determine the league champion.

Assem Hammad, head coach of Ahli, winner of the Aswan group, said he was pleased his team took the top spot and described the competition as being very tough. "The matches were very close with Zamalek and Olympic, but it was easy against Tayaran," said Hammad. "I am pleased with the team's results in general, but I'm disappointed with the performance of some of my players, especially those of the national team. Some are injured and tired after playing in European tournaments." Hammad said the decision to play the second tournament only four days after the first was wrong. "The players did not have time to train." He hoped that under such difficult circumstances, Ahli will come out victorious and perform at the same level, without any more players getting seriously injured. "This tournament is harder than the one before it because it will include the best handball teams in the country, like Sporting. That's why the head coaches of the other teams call it 'the group of death'," Hammad added.

Come on, Komen!

KENYA'S outdoor 5,000 metres world champion Daniel Komen broke the indoor 3,000 metres world record last week in a time later confirmed as seven minutes 24.90 seconds. The 21-year-old Kenyan broke the old record of seven minutes 26.14 seconds set this year by Haile Gebrselassie of Ethiopia in Karlsruhe on 25 January. Komen, who picked up a $15,000 cheque for his achievement, took the lead off his pacemaking compatriot David Kisang at the 1,200 metres mark and stormed home to slice almost two seconds off the old time.

Boris in a nutshell

RUSSIAN President Boris Yeltsin sang the praises of sport last week in his weekly speech to the nation, saying that politics and economic troubles would take a back seat during the Winter Olympics in Nagano in Japan. During this period, the most important thing for Russians will be "how many palets our team will score against the Americans and whether the Russian skiers will beat the tough Norwegians and Italians," Yeltsin said.

The president admitted that while Russians respected all other nations, they wanted to be first. He said he hoped that as in Lillehammer (Norway) in 1994, the Russian delegation would come away with the greatest number of gold medals. Yeltsin said that playing sport was important, noting that he himself had played volleyball as a young man and then later tennis. "Sport helped to form my character, taught me discipline, taught me to win and what is more important, it taught me to get up again after a defeat or setback. In a nutshell, I respect and love sport," Yeltsin said.

Rocchi on the rocks

GERMANY'S Graciano Rocchigiani was forced to pull out of Saturday's fight for the vacant World Boxing Council (WBC) light-heavyweight title against American Michael Nunn after running a temperature and losing two kilos on Saturday. Ring Doctor Walter Wagner said that a boxer who had attempted to fight in Rocchigiani's condition would have been risking his life. The 33-year-old Rocchigiani, a former International Boxing Federation (IBF) title holder, would have received 1.1 million dollars for the fight. He will now face Nunn for the crown, left vacant by American Roy Jones, on 14 March. Nunn, 34, a former World Boxing Association (WBA) and IBF title holder, was clearly upset by the decision. Rocchigiani has had to cancel three world title bouts in the past few months because of illness or lack of preparation.

Death of a champion

TWO-TIME table tennis world champion Toshiaki Tanaka has died after suffering multiple organ failure. He was 62. Tanaka, who joined the World Table Tennis Federation's Hall of Fame last year, died at a hospital in the Southern Japan prefecture of Fukuoka. He swept the national singles titles for three consecutive years from 1954, climbing to the world's top ranking in 1955 and 1957.

Romme romps home

GIANNI Romme of the Netherlands reclaimed his 5,000 metres world speed skating record in the Olympic race here Sunday to win the gold medal in an astonishing six minutes 22.20 seconds. Fellow Dutchman Rintje Ritsma and Belgium's Bart Veldkamp had both broken Romme's old record in the preceding 60 minutes, but Romme was six seconds faster in his gold medal-winning performance. Ritsma took the silver and Veldkamp the bronze.

No go in Nagano

SECURITY in Nagano has been dramatically stepped up. Local school caretakers have been ordered to lock up baseball pitching machines. The police are worried the machines, which hurl down balls at 150kph, could be used by cunning terrorists.

Big numbers

THE Nagano Games organisers found they had a real hit on Saturday's opening day. Their Internet site had 9.6 million hits. They added that 5,555 million people helped carry the Olympic Flame across the 47 Japanese prefectures.

Such a chatterbox

EMPEROR Akihito upset carefully laid traffic plans after the Nagano Games opening ceremony on Saturday by hanging around to chat with some of the main guests, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Jodie Williams and British landmine victim Chris Moon, who was one of the final Olympic torchbearers. Nervous security agents kept streets around the stadium clear for 20 minutes waiting for the imperial couple to leave. Buses for thousands of officials and media were held up in the mounting congestion.

Mother's Day

OLGA Danilova and Sari Krooks made it mother's day in the Nagano Winter Olympics last Sunday. Krooks from Finland followed four-year-old daughter Annika's advice to score the first women's ice hockey goal in the Olympics in their match against Sweden. As for Danilova from Russia, she won the first gold medal of the Nagano Winter Olympics after covering the tough 15km cross country course at Hakuba in 46 minutes and 55 seconds, and thus won some time to see her twin boys.

Doris Shoukri: With bright wings

Friendship and marriage into a distinguished Egyptian family brought Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri to Egypt. The American University in Cairo provided a space in which to build bridges

photo: Sherif Sonbol

She walks into the room carrying The Iliad *and* The Odyssey, Mrs Dalloway, The Unbearable Lightness of Being. *In her mind who knows what texts she carries today, what matches she will strike unexpectedly in the dark? At the head of the table she gives us food for thought, and we gather round her, secure, free, ingredients with which this hour may be confected, this moment of being made palpable.*

Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri, Ph.D in English and Medieval Latin, Bryn Mawr College and Girton College, Cambridge. Experience (over 40 years) at the American University in Cairo (AUC): assistant, associate and full professor and chairman of the Department of English and Comparative Literature (1957 - present). Chairman of the Freshman Year Program (1970-1980), and the Humanities Division (1958-1961). Founder of the ELI and the Freshman Writing Program. Courses taught include: Introduction to literature, Greek and Latin classics in translation, Henry James, Contemporary European literature. Published articles include: "The Nature of Being in Woolf and Duras", "In Principio Erat Verbum: The Mysticism of Marguerite Duras", "Dante Revisited". On her work on 15th-century dramatist Chaundler and which culminated in a book, an edition, with translation, introduction and notes to Chaundler's *Apologia de omni statu humanae naturae* (Renaissance Society, NY and Modern Humanities Research Society, London, 1974), Shoukri says: "It was like detective work, to reconstruct somebody with so little, so few records to go on."

Thanks to her founding of AUC's *Distinguished Visiting Person programme* in 1965, the following luminaries, among many others, came to AUC and gave lectures to an audience extending beyond the university's confines: Robert Lowell, I A Richards, John Updike, Robert Penn Warren, William Styron, John Cheever, Desmond O'Grady, John Fowles, Nathalie Sarraute, Quentin Bell, Marguerite Duras, Al-Tayeb Salih, Terry Eagleton, Edward Said. Echoing the sense of intellectual and ontological well-being experienced by many of her students, Angus Wilson wrote of his experience as DVP: "Doris Shoukri was the most understanding and well-informed hostess I have encountered at a university..."

In spite of being affiliated with AUC for longer than any person currently attached to it, which makes her a "tribal elder", as anthropologist and AUC's dean of the School of Humanities and Social Sciences Cynthia Nelson phrases it, when approached about the possibility of a profile, Shoukri's immediate reply was: "But I *haven't really done anything.*" *Doing:* that's for CVs and others to say. Being: an overwhelming question that Doris Shoukri has probed in her writing and in the classroom, a question she has not brushed aside with an irritated "oh, do not ask what it is."

I made my visit to elegant, understated Nile-view Zamalek rooms where, one imagines, soigné men and women may have come and gone. Though one has seen such tasteful interiors already, Doris Shoukri interacting with her three-year-old granddaughter Camilla is certainly no mere society lady complementing the ambience. Already a formidable personality and an excellent hostess, Camilla elicits from Shoukri such remarks as: "The other day she was surreptitiously trying to get me to teach her the subjunctive form of 'jouer'."

"You want me to say something about Dr Shoukri?... how do I begin?" a former student of Shoukri muses over the phone. On a humourous note..." (though "it's just not her style to be waving and saying hi to everyone on campus", all who know "Doris" agree that she has a remarkable sense of humour, one friend who has known her for over 40 years going as far as to remark: "I never feel bored speaking with her. Never.") A few minutes into the phone call: "You managed to stay awake in class at 8am in the winter... later, when you used to render or take stock of an experience or a person, you found you were thinking along the lines of the phrases you heard Dr Shoukri say..." She has a surreptitious way of making "ontology" a part of your vocabulary. As if you, a mere 18-year-old had always known the word.

"Do you want to start at the beginning? If that's all right," Shoukri says, having *tentatively accepted the idea* that 2,000 words or so, plus a photo, could cut a "profile". Her silhouette? "Like a dowager swan, serene, majestic," remarks a former student who once caught a glimpse of Dr *Shoukri swimming at the Gezira Club.*

The beginning is not Once Upon a Time. Not with a nine-year-old who, without prompting, read *Anna Karenina*, unabridged, enjoyed it, and did not realise till *much later that there was anything unusual* in that. Not with a first-grader teaching her classmates how to tell time. Nor is the end in a fairy-tale castle on a mountain. Nor yet in an enchanted circle of literary giants.

If to each a tale, what genre would hers, would she, be? "That is hard," she says, "... *Enigma Variations...* Some kind of fictional prose narrative maybe ... of an avant-garde kind."

The beginning: "I met... *I came* to accompany my [not yet then] sister-in-law," anthropologist Laila El-Hamamsy. Of El-Hamamsy at Bryn Mawr, Shoukri writes: "One encountered a first-class intellect, *disciplined and wide ranging, with a* pronounced sense of the ridiculous and a moral sense that was so highly developed as to be almost stern." Like knows like. El-Hamamsy, née Shoukri, on Shoukri, née Enright: "She had her own original ideas about things, and a very critical mind. There is nothing banal about her way of seeing things."

If beginnings and endings are telling, the interview with Doris Shoukri tells of a woman who takes great pride in her family — Mohamed, Kimmy, Karim, Marlene, Morella, Maia ("the first, as beautiful and perhaps as bright as her father"), Tarek, Camilla. To emphasise the importance of AUC to Doris, Joyce Foda — who dates their close friendship to when, 20 years ago, she had a serious eye operation and Doris came and read to her — says: "After her family, Doris has been totally devoted to AUC and its students." For over 30 years Shoukri's administrative assistant, Laurice Nassour admires the fact that "this very distinguished woman" is "a wonderful mother" who "can deal with both ends."

The interview begins with family and, at its end, returns to family. The last words of the interview are about her husband, distinguished gynecologist Mohamed Shoukri: "In his treatment of patients, his is a natural humanity. He would know how to give a poor man a piece of bread without embarrassing him. He has a real talent for human relations of this kind, without any mawkishness or sentimentality... Balm on a wound, but also brilliant, sharply critical."

So she first came to Egypt in 1954 on a visit. Even though she was merely on holiday in a country of which she did not have much prior knowledge ("I have never been very interested in politics"), and cross-cultural marriages were not on anyone's mind, "I realised," she says, "that it would be really ridiculous for me to marry someone whom I did *not* find intensely, poetically, witty." A year later, Mohamed Shoukri and Doris Enright-Clark were married, *two months after she was offered* a job at AUC.

This was a time of exit visas — something she had never heard of. This is a place where, unlike in New York where she grew up, *anonymity is* impossible. A time and place of sequestration.

"I literally wept over that library", when in 1967 AUC was sequestrated. "It was built with love." Chafika El-Hamamsy, who first *knew Doris Shoukri socially and then*, in the early '60s, became a student of hers, explains why she found the extremely inspiring intellectual a surprise: "Doris is not a show-off. She never talked about her in*tellectual life in a social context.*" Yet, Shoukri uses the word "boast" when referring to the library: "We did it from scratch... Before, the library consisted of the left-overs from the bottom of a missionary barrel, *totally without rationale... but we...*" So it was you and...? "By 'we', I'm just talking about myself, I'm using the royal 'we'..." *Les autres, toujours les autres.*

So we planted the seed of a library "with *so much desire to make it make sense*", tended it when it was a fragile sapling. An act of creation. Imagine an "I" so profoundly marked by all the books it has, and has not, read. Imagine a library. Fill *out order forms for books by and on* everyone who matters in English literature, from Beowolf to Virginia Woolf — systematically. Load 'em onto the wagons and haul 'em over to Hill House. A boys' *dormitory* becomes a library. The best English library in a city no less significant than Um Al-Dunia. A world, a universe, comes into being. Something already lasting in the lives of others. "A bridge *thrown out toward an unseen shore.*"

"It was a very creative thing; it was building": Shoukri on being in administration for so long. Comments on Shoukri's "style" as an administrator by, in no particular order, Ferial Ghazoul, John Rodenbeck, Cynthia Nelson, George Scanlon, Mahmoud El-Lozy: "As a politique, she is a walking success. When she saw change that was good for the university, *she accepted it well and did honourably* and valiantly. Others would have fought unnecessary battles." "She has been chairman of the English Department by popular will." "When facing a controversial decision, *she thinks of the consequences several years down the line.*" "She goes for what are the central kinds of things to keep a department on target." "She recognises quality and isn't nosey about details." "She *upgrades everything* she touches. A department meeting becomes a discussion of ideas and issues, not agendas. That creativity of hers makes the department not just a group of people, but something with a spark."

As for "one of the best things we have done in the university", namely, the Freshman Tutorial Programme, which ran from 1970 for over 15 years, and which was conceived as a means to bridge the gap between memorising-intensive *thanawiyya amma* and the demands made on individual, critical thinking by a liberal arts type of education, that was a coup de grâce. Blessed were those AUC students who at the tender age of 17, only two months after *thanawiyya amma* brutality, were told that "when you start on your journey to Ithaca" you are the quest while the quest lasts. You would read *Gilgamesh*, *The Heart of Darkness*, Machiavelli, Freud, Marx, listen to a lecture about each text in Oriental Hall by professors from different disciplines, and meet with a tutor and nine other students around a table to *discuss* the texts. This was not sitting in rows, but a world of minds and voyages — a university.

Such a thrilling sense of horizons opening up, such intellectual frisson, an indelible moment of being in the lives of many AUC students, was the brainchild of one who could, and did, teach logic with the best of them. ("One never finds in Dr Shoukri the least aspect of casualness, disorderliness or illogicality").

Though she herself has never made a foray into Arabic literature — "She knew," comments George Scanlon, head of the Arabic Studies Department, "it was emanating from a tradition which she can never hope [to really know] except by going all the way back at the beginning of her career and absorbing it" — she has, *says Ferial Ghazoul, professor of English* and Comparative Literature and editor of the bilingual journal of comparative poetics, *Alif*, been very supportive of the journal and has "encouraged AUC students to study Arabic literature" and members of the department to cultivate relations with the national universities.

Shoukri's keynote address inaugurating in 1986 the Madalyn Lamont Awards for creative writing (in English and Arabic) shows how what might be mistaken as aloofness vis-a-vis Arabic literature is, more than anything, an awareness of her own limitations. "It was," the address begins, "with considerable reluctance that I agreed to make some brief remarks today about the study of literature in Egypt." Reluctance, because others "would have been more qualified", agreement, because of her "desire... to share in this gesture to commemorate Madalyn's life", sharing as she does "with her a passion for literature, a belief in its reality and efficacy, in its saving grace in the face of what Camus referred to as the absurd and cruel statistics of death."

The address, pace Jung, Eliot, Ezekiel, Dante and others, is an extended "if A... then B" proposition. If: "the study of literature... is at no time, nowhere open to question. Not in Montale's war-torn Italy, not in Cairo now [during the curfew], not in Beirut for that matter. It is not a decision anyone takes." If: great art "is not an escape from Reality, but a focusing upon Reality." Then: it is the duty of those who teach literature "to allow you [students of literature] to wrestle with your angles, or seek out your demons, dally with your muses, or suffer the shower of gold with all the courage that such freedom takes... Do not fear that in serving Art you will be failing in your duty to serve society and country... Be artists, and it will follow as the night the day. Egyptian artists you shall also be and your works 'will reach to the most distant of ages,' like Vigny's '*bouteille à la mer*' or like the pyramids, *insha'Allah.*"

Doris Shoukri *sets* herself against the assumption "that certain areas of human experience and achievement are, like yachts, for wealthier people or Westerners only." The universal human capacity, French, *Egyptian or otherwise, "for spontaneous,* gratuitous thought," she firmly believes, must be "protected". And like a literary winged creature brooding over her charge, she is protective of the space in which they *can grow.*

And indeed there will be time, she thought, when, without taking up world-reforming cudgeols, she delivered her brainchild, the AUC Freshman Tutorial *Program*, "*time to clear in* [the *thanawiyya amma* survivor's] overcrowded mind a space upon which... he may build." "time to discover how far he has come and where he would like to go," "by starting *where he is, with his own being-in-the-world,*" time "to reveal, to add space... to stand by as security while urging the student from his secure perimetres to wider, less visible, diminishing ones... to see to it that the student *survives this baffling* and unsettling experience... and finds his footing in a larger world."

"You feel she respects you and she respects what she is doing and has love for it. She gives you a *space. She has this* balance: she gives you the whole picture, but she does this not just through lecturing about background and theory but through discussion of the texts. I am glad she is there. It feels safe. You feel you are in safe hands." — one of Shoukri's current students. "She gave you light" — one of her former students.

"You would go into her class," says Mahmoud El-Lozi, a former student, now associate professor at AUC, "conscious that the door would be shut, so that there would be no noise from the outside. A closed quasi-religious atmosphere. And contrasting with the quietness was the turmoil in our minds..."

Other voices: "She makes you feel how the writer is a person, a full person, and not just a name." "She enables me to visualise. Her way *is conversational,* everything flows, you get a distinct sense of the whole thing." "It is the creative writer in her that makes her different from others." "Understated, at the same time incredibly moving. She isn't a teacher, how to explain?, she recognised if you were good and helped you get better. I shone under her."

She gives us food for thought, opens magical casements, tells us of Keats's "Upon First Reading Chapman's Homer" and says: "Write something. Be as creative as you like. Call it 'Upon First Reading Eliot's "The Waste Land".'" Do not fear, she said. Fear no more. We have shored these fragments.

Profile by **Nur Elmessiri**

